



The Odyssey

Homer

Online Information

For the online version of BookRags' The Odyssey Premium Study Guide, including complete copyright information, please visit:

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-odyssey/>

Copyright Information

©2000-2007 BookRags, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

The following sections of this BookRags Premium Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

©1998-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copywritten by BookRags, Inc.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Author Biography</u>	2
<u>Plot Summary</u>	4
<u>The Background to the Story</u>	4
<u>Book 1: Athena Inspires Telemachus</u>	4
<u>Book 2: Telemachus Sails to Pylos</u>	4
<u>Book 3: Nestor Tells What He Knows</u>	5
<u>Book 4: In the Home of Menelaus and Helen</u>	5
<u>Book 5: Odysseus Sets Sail for Home and is Shipwrecked</u>	5
<u>Book 6: Nausicaa Encounters a Stranger</u>	6
<u>Book 7: Odysseus and the King of Phaeacia</u>	6
<u>Book 8: The Phaeacians Entertain Odysseus</u>	6
<u>Book 9: Odysseus Tells His Story - Polyphemus and the Cyclopes</u>	6
<u>Book 10: Odysseus Tells His Story - At the Islands of Aeolus and Circe</u>	7
<u>Book 11: Odysseus Tells His Story-In the House of the Dead</u>	8
<u>Book 12: Odysseus Tells His Story-The Sun-God's Cattle</u>	8
<u>Book 13: Return to Ithaca and the Stone Ship</u>	8
<u>Book 14: The Loyal Swineherd</u>	9
<u>Book 15: Telemachus Heads for Home</u>	9
<u>Book 16: Father and Son Reunited</u>	9
<u>Book 17: A Beggar at the Gate</u>	9
<u>Book 18: The Two Beggar-Kings</u>	10
<u>Book 19: Penelope Interrogates her Guest</u>	10
<u>Book 20: Things Begin to Look Bad for the Suitors</u>	10
<u>Book 21: The Great Bow of Odysseus</u>	11
<u>Book 22: The Death of the Suitors</u>	11
<u>Book 23: The Reunion</u>	11

Table of Contents

Plot Summary

<u>Book 24: Peace at Last</u>	11
<u>Book 1</u>	13
<u>Book 2</u>	15
<u>Book 3</u>	17
<u>Book 4</u>	19
<u>Book 5</u>	21
<u>Book 6</u>	23
<u>Book 7</u>	24
<u>Book 8</u>	26
<u>Book 9</u>	28
<u>Book 10</u>	30
<u>Book 11</u>	32
<u>Book 12</u>	34

Table of Contents

<u>Book 13</u>	36
<u>Book 14</u>	38
<u>Book 15</u>	39
<u>Book 16</u>	41
<u>Book 17</u>	43
<u>Book 18</u>	45
<u>Book 19</u>	47
<u>Book 20</u>	49
<u>Book 21</u>	51
<u>Book 22</u>	53
<u>Book 23</u>	55
<u>Book 24</u>	57
<u>Characters</u>	59
<u>Achilles</u>	59
<u>Achilleus</u>	59
<u>Aeacides</u>	59
<u>Aeolus</u>	59

Table of Contents

Characters

<u>Agamemnon</u>	60
<u>Aias</u>	60
<u>Ajax (Oilean, the Lesser)</u>	60
<u>Ajax (Telamonian, the Greater)</u>	60
<u>Ajax the Greater</u>	61
<u>Ajax the Lesser</u>	61
<u>Akhilleus</u>	61
<u>Alcinous</u>	61
<u>Antinoos</u>	61
<u>Antinous</u>	61
<u>Aphrodite</u>	62
<u>Apollo</u>	62
<u>Arete</u>	62
<u>Artemis</u>	63
<u>Athena</u>	63
<u>Athene</u>	64
<u>Atreides</u>	64
<u>Atrides</u>	64
<u>Calypso</u>	64
<u>Circe</u>	65
<u>Ctesippus</u>	65
<u>Demodocus</u>	66
<u>Demodokos</u>	66
<u>Eumaeus</u>	66
<u>Eumaios</u>	67
<u>Eurycleia</u>	67
<u>Eurylochos</u>	68
<u>Eurylochos</u>	68

Table of Contents

Characters

<u>Eurylokhos</u>	68
<u>Eurymachos</u>	68
<u>Eurymachus</u>	68
<u>Eurymakhos</u>	69
<u>Helen</u>	69
<u>Kalypso</u>	70
<u>Kirke</u>	70
<u>Ktesippos</u>	70
<u>Laertes</u>	70
<u>Melanthios</u>	71
<u>Melanthius</u>	71
<u>Menelaos</u>	71
<u>Menelaus</u>	72
<u>Nausicaa</u>	72
<u>Nausikaa</u>	73
<u>Nestor</u>	73
<u>Odysseus</u>	73
<u>Oilean</u>	75
<u>Pelides</u>	75
<u>Penelope</u>	75
<u>Philoetius</u>	76
<u>Philoitios</u>	76
<u>Polyphemos</u>	76
<u>Polyphemos</u>	76
<u>Poseidon</u>	77
<u>Teiresias</u>	77
<u>Telamonian</u>	77
<u>Telemachos</u>	77

Table of Contents

Characters

<u>Telemachus</u>	78
<u>Tiresias</u>	78
<u>Tritogeneia</u>	79
<u>Zeus</u>	79

Themes.....80

<u>Creativity, Imagination, and Deception</u>	80
<u>Heroism</u>	81
<u>Human Condition</u>	81
<u>Love and Loyalty</u>	82
<u>Order and Disorder</u>	83

Style.....84

<u>General Technique</u>	84
<u>Meter</u>	84
<u>Similes</u>	85
<u>Foreshadowing</u>	85
<u>Symbolism</u>	86

Historical Context.....88

<u>The Bronze Age</u>	88
<u>The Dark Age</u>	89
<u>The Iron Age</u>	90

Critical Overview.....92

Table of Contents

<u>Criticism</u>	95
<u>Critical Essay #1</u>	96
<u>Critical Essay #2</u>	101
<u>Critical Essay #3</u>	105
<u>Media Adaptations</u>	110
<u>Topics for Further Study</u>	112
<u>Compare & Contrast</u>	113
<u>What Do I Read Next?</u>	115
<u>Sources for Further Study</u>	116
<u>Copyright Information</u>	120

Introduction

For all practical purposes, the *Odyssey* is the "sequel" to the earliest well-known surviving work in Western literature, the *Iliad*. (The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, while at least 1,000 years older, is neither as well known nor as influential as Homer's work.) Unlike many sequels in the present era, however, the *Odyssey* actually seems to be an improvement, in some respects, on the original, and stands quite well as an independent work.

Odysseia-the poem's name in Greek since Herodotus called it that in the fifth century BC-means simply "the story of Odysseus." The word "odyssey" that derives from this name has come to mean any significant and difficult journey. Although the poem is technically about one particular man's journey, as Horace observed in his first *Satire*, "*mutato nomine, fabula de te narratur*," "just change the name and the story could be told about you."

If we were to call the *Iliad* the world's first adventure story, the *Odyssey* could be called its first opera: certainly some of the plot twists along the way would be at home in that extravagant genre. In the context of Odysseus's voyages and troubles, the poem touches on a number of significant topics such as loyalty, heroism, creativity, and order. Where the *Iliad* is noteworthy for its similes and epithets, the *Odyssey* is justly famous for its use of symbolism and for the pace and variety of its action.

For more than 1,500 years the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* set the standard by which epic poetry, if not all poetry of any kind, was judged. The epic form in poetry has not been widely practiced since the appearance of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in 1667, but the story of Odysseus's wanderings has remained a perennial favorite to the present day.

Author Biography

Everything we know about Homer is either traditional, mythical, or based upon educated guesswork. Tradition tells us, probably following the *Odyssey* and one of the so-called "Homeric Hymns" from the middle of the seventh century BC, that Homer, like his own character Demodocus, was a blind bard or singer of tales.

At least seven different places claimed that Homer was born on their soil in the ancient world. The two with the strongest claims are the island of Chios and the city of Smyrna (modern Izmir, in Turkey). The consensus of opinion is that Homer probably lived and worked in Ionia, the region along what is now the west coast of Turkey. This conclusion is based on several ancient traditions about Homer and his origins, and also on clues in his works, chiefly the preponderance of Ionic dialect in the poems and the sketchy knowledge of the geography of western Greece displayed in the *Odyssey* (the overland chariot journey from Pylos to Sparta at the end of Book 3 would have been physically impossible, and Homer's description of Ithaca is so vague that some scholars have suggested he did not mean the island that currently bears the name), in contrast to the vivid depictions of Troy and its environs in the *Iliad*.

We can only guess at the time when Homer lived and wrote. Some ancient traditions suggested that Homer lived relatively close to the time of the events he described. The fifth-century historian Herodotus, on the other hand (*Histories*, II.53), said that Homer could not possibly have lived more than 400 years before his own time. The rediscovery of writing by the Greeks around 750 BC and the development, at about the same time, of some of the fighting techniques described in the *Iliad* have led scholars to assign Homer to the middle or late part of the eighth century BC.

Accurate dating of Homer's poems is impossible, but it is generally thought that the *Iliad* is older than the *Odyssey*, as that work displays some more "advanced" stylistic features. Both poems had to have been completed before the Peisistratid dynasty came to power in Athens in the sixth century BC, because it is known that a member of that

family commissioned a "standard edition" of the poems. Also during the sixth century BC, both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were recited in full at the Great Panathenaia, a religious festival in honor of Athena which was observed in Athens every four years.

There have been any number of controversies about Homer since his time, beginning with the contention over just exactly where and when he was born, lived, and died. Others have questioned whether Homer existed at all, and whether a poet named Homer actually "wrote" the poems attributed to him or merely culled them from popular folklore. The question of whether the same person produced both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has also been debated. English poet and critic Samuel Butler (1835-1902) suggested that the *Odyssey* was the work of a woman, but this view did not gain wide acceptance.

Most scholars at least agree that there was an epic poet called Homer, and that he played the primary part in producing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in their known forms.

Plot Summary

The Background to the Story

After ten years, the Trojan War is over and the Achaeans head for home-with varying results. Some, like Nestor, come home quickly to find things pretty much as they left them. Others, like Agamemnon, arrive home to find things considerably changed. Still others, like Menelaus, wander for a time but eventually return home safely and little the worse for wear.

Odysseus, on the other hand, has been having no end of trouble getting home. As the story opens, we find ourselves in the tenth year since the end of the war, a full 20 years since Odysseus first left his home and wife Penelope to sail off for Troy with the rest of the Achaean forces.

Book 1: Athena Inspires Telemachus

In a council of the gods, Athena asks her father Zeus why Odysseus is still stuck on Calypso's island ten years after the end of the war. Zeus responds that Poseidon is angry at Odysseus for having blinded his son, Polyphemus. But since Poseidon is temporarily absent, Zeus gives Athena permission to begin arrangements for Odysseus's return. Athena goes to Ithaca in disguise and inspires Odysseus's son Telemachus to go in search of news of his father. Heartened by her words, Telemachus announces his intention to sail to the mainland.

Book 2: Telemachus Sails to Pylos

Telemachus calls an assembly and asks for assistance in getting to the mainland. His independent attitude does not sit well with his mother Penelope's suitors, who oppose him in the assembly so that he does not receive the aid he sought. After making secret

preparations, Telemachus and the disguised Athena depart for Pylos that same evening.

Book 3: Nestor Tells What He Knows

Telemachus and Athena arrive in Pylos, to find Nestor and his family offering sacrifice to Poseidon. After joining in the ritual, Telemachus introduces himself to Nestor and explains his purpose in coming. Nestor has heard news of the returns of both Menelaus and Agamemnon, which he relates to Telemachus, but has had no news of Odysseus since all of the Achaeans left Troy ten years previously. Nestor sends Telemachus, accompanied by one of his own sons, Pisistratus, to visit Menelaus in Sparta.

Book 4: In the Home of Menelaus and Helen

Telemachus and Pisistratus arrive at Menelaus's home during a celebration, and are warmly entertained by Menelaus and Helen. Menelaus tells a long story of his adventures on the way home from Troy, including news that he got from Proteus in Egypt that Odysseus was alive on Calypso's Island. Meanwhile, back in Ithaca, the suitors learn of Telemachus's secret departure and are not pleased. They plot to ambush and kill him on his way home. Penelope also learns of her son's departure.

Book 5: Odysseus Sets Sail for Home and is Shipwrecked

At another council of the gods, Zeus orders Hermes to go to Calypso and tell her to let Odysseus leave for Ithaca. Calypso is unhappy, but obeys the order. She offers Odysseus a chance to become immortal and to live with her forever; which he declines. Odysseus builds a raft with tools and materials she provides, and sails off. Poseidon comes back from feasting with the Ethiopians and wrecks the raft in a storm.

Odysseus, with the help of a sea goddess, is washed safely ashore in the land of the Phaeacians.

Book 6: Nausicaa Encounters a Stranger

The Phaeacian Princess Nausicaa finds the shipwrecked Odysseus asleep behind a bush. Odysseus asks Nausicaa for help. She gives him some clothing to wear and sends him into town to find the palace of her father, Alcinous.

Book 7: Odysseus and the King of Phaeacia

Odysseus arrives at the palace and begs the assistance of King Alcinous and Queen Arete. He gives an edited version of his "adventures" to date, but does not disclose his identity. He deftly turns aside Alcinous' s suggestion that he should remain in Phaeacia and marry Nausicaa.

Book 8: The Phaeacians Entertain Odysseus

The Phaeacians treat Odysseus to a day of feasting, song, and athletic events. When Odysseus begins weeping during Demodocus's tale of the Trojan War, Alcinous cuts the banquet short. At dinner that evening, Odysseus speaks highly of Demodocus's skill and offers him a prime cut of his own portion. When Demodocus sings the story of the Trojan Horse, Odysseus begins crying again, and Alcinous asks Odysseus who he is and why stories about Troy make him cry.

Book 9: Odysseus Tells His Story - Polyphemus and the Cyclopes

Odysseus reveals his identity and tells his story, beginning with his departure from

Troy with 12 ships. He sacks Ismarus in Thrace, is blown off course to the land of the Lotus-Eaters, and eventually reaches the island of the Cyclopes, one-eyed giants who are sons of the sea god Poseidon.

Odysseus and the crew of his ship go to investigate this island and end up imprisoned in Polyphemus's cave. The giant finds the intruders and eats several of them for dinner. After a similar breakfast, he takes his flocks of sheep and goats to graze, leaving Odysseus and his remaining men penned in the cave. Upon Polyphemus's return, they manage to get the giant drunk and blind him. The next day they escape from his cave hiding under the bellies of his sheep and goats. Odysseus unwisely reveals his true name, and Polyphemus asks his father Poseidon to avenge his injury.

Book 10: Odysseus Tells His Story - At the Islands of Aeolus and Circe

Odysseus and his surviving crewmen now sail to the island of Aeolus, king of the winds. Aeolus gives Odysseus a bag containing all the winds that would blow him off his homeward course. They sail away and come close enough to Ithaca to see the watch-fires, when Odysseus falls asleep at the helm and his crew, thinking the bag contains a hoard of gold, untie it and release the captive winds-which blow them right back to Aeolus's island.

Aeolus refuses to help them again, saying that they are obviously cursed by the gods.

Odysseus and his crew set sail once more and eventually reach the land of the Laestrygonians, who destroy all but one of his ships. The survivors sail to Circe's island, where most of them are promptly turned into pigs by this enchantress. Odysseus, forewarned by Hermes, avoids Circe's trap and frees his men. They remain with Circe for a year before Odysseus's men ask to leave. Circe tells Odysseus that he must first visit the underworld and consult with the shade of the prophet Tiresias on how best to get home.

Book 11: Odysseus Tells His Story-In the House of the Dead

Obeying Circe's instructions, Odysseus and his men sail to the underworld, where they make sacrifices to Hades and Persephone, and consult Tiresias. When Tiresias retires, the shades of Odysseus's mother and several of his comrades at Troy appear, including those of Achilles and Agamemnon. Odysseus also witnesses the punishment of several notorious offenders against the gods.

Book 12: Odysseus Tells His Story-The Sun-God's Cattle

Upon his return from the underworld, Odysseus receives sailing instructions from Circe: how to avoid the lure of the Sirens, how to get past the monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis, and above all, not to harm the cattle of the sun-god on the Island of Thrinacia. Cast upon Thrinacia by a fierce storm and out of provisions, Odysseus's men disobey him and slaughter some of the cattle. The sun god complains to Zeus, who destroys the ship with a thunderbolt. Only Odysseus survives, and he drifts to Calypso's island by hanging on to floating wreckage. This ends Odysseus's story as told to the Phaeacians

Book 13: Return to Ithaca and the Stone Ship

The Phaeacians return Odysseus and all his treasures to his home of Ithaca while he himself is deep asleep. Athena, in disguise, meets Odysseus and he tries to trick her, without success, with a false story about himself. She reveals her identity and tells him how much she cares for him, and together they plot a stratagem for dealing with Penelope's suitors. After stowing Odysseus's treasure safely in a cave, Athena disguises Odysseus as an ancient beggar and sends him on his way. Poseidon, angry

that the Phaeacians have helped Odysseus get back to Ithaca, turns their ship into a huge stone, visible to onlookers on shore and rooted to the sea-bottom.

Book 14: The Loyal Swineherd

Odysseus makes his way to the dwelling of Eumaeus, a swineherd who has remained loyal to his long-absent employer. Odysseus, still in disguise, entertains Eumaeus with some "lying tales" about himself.

Book 15: Telemachus Heads for Home

Telemachus takes his leave of Helen and Menelaus. Telemachus offers passage to the seer Theoclymenus, who is fleeing vengeance for a kinsman's death. Back in Ithaca, Eumaeus tells Odysseus the story of his life. Telemachus evades the suitors' ambush and sends Theoclymenus home with a friend, as he intends to visit Eumaeus in the country before returning to the palace and the suitors.

Book 16: Father and Son Reunited

Telemachus goes to Eumaeus's hut, where Odysseus reveals himself to his son and impresses on him the need for secrecy and deception if they are to overcome the suitors. Meanwhile, the ship the suitors had sent out to ambush Telemachus returns, and the suitors try, without success, to come up with an alternative plan to get rid of him.

Book 17: A Beggar at the Gate

Telemachus returns to the palace and speaks with his mother. Eumaeus brings Odysseus to the palace. On the way they encounter the goatherd Melanthius, an ally of the suitors, who insults Odysseus. As Odysseus enters the palace, an old hunting dog

recognizes him and dies on the spot. Most of the suitors treat Odysseus with at least grudging respect, but Antinous throws a footstool at him. Penelope asks Eumaeus to arrange a meeting with her disguised husband.

Book 18: The Two Beggar-Kings

Odysseus is insulted by Irus, a professional beggar whom the suitors favor. The two men fight, much to the amusement of the suitors, and Odysseus quickly subdues Irus. Penelope comes to the hall to extract presents from the suitors and to announce her intention of remarrying. Odysseus is insulted by the maid Melantho and Eurymachus, one of the leading suitors, who throws another footstool at him.

Book 19: Penelope Interrogates her Guest

Odysseus and his son take all the weapons from the great hall, assisted by Athena. Melantho again insults Odysseus. Penelope speaks to her disguised husband, who claims to know Odysseus and tells her that he is nearby and will be home quickly. She does not believe him, but orders his old nurse, Eurycleia, to wash him. The nurse recognizes Odysseus by a scar he received as a young man and is sworn to secrecy. Penelope details the trial of the bow, by which she will choose her new husband on the following day.

Book 20: Things Begin to Look Bad for the Suitors

Odysseus lies awake plotting revenge until Athena puts him to sleep. On the next day, the loyal ox-herd Philoetius arrives at the palace, where Odysseus is again insulted by one of the suitors, Ctesippus, who throws an ox-foot at him. The suitors all laugh at this, which Theoclymenus interprets as a sign that they are all marked for death.

Book 21: The Great Bow of Odysseus

Penelope fetches Odysseus's hunting bow and announces the test: she will marry the man who can string the bow and shoot an arrow through the rings on twelve axe-heads set in a line in the ground. Odysseus reveals himself to his two loyal servants and enlists their help in getting revenge on the suitors. None of the suitors is able to string the bow. Telemachus is on the point of succeeding when Odysseus stops him. Telemachus, by prearrangement with his father, sends his mother from the hall and gives the bow to Odysseus, who strings it and shoots an arrow through the axes.

Book 22: The Death of the Suitors

With his next arrow, Odysseus shoots Antinous and announces his true identity to the rest of the suitors. Odysseus, Telemachus, Philoetius, and Eumaeus, assisted by a disguised Athena, kill all the suitors. When all the suitors are dead, the disloyal maids are hanged and Melanthius is punished. The loyal servants begin to clean the palace after the slaughter.

Book 23: The Reunion

Old Eurycleia wakes Penelope with the news that her husband has returned and destroyed the suitors. Penelope refuses to believe it. When he answers her trick question about their marriage bed, she accepts him as her husband and they retire to bed after making plans to deal with the relatives of the suitors whom Odysseus has just killed. Before they sleep, Odysseus tells his wife his true story.

Book 24: Peace at Last

The shades of the suitors arrive in Hades, and tell Agamemnon and Achilles of Odysseus's triumphant revenge on them for their destruction of his estate. Odysseus

goes to meet his aged father Laertes in the country and, after telling him another "lying tale," reveals himself to his father. The suitors' relatives arrive at that point, seeking vengeance for the deaths of their kinsmen. Athena and Zeus intervene in the fighting that ensues and, after a few of the suitors' relatives are killed, Athena makes peace.

Book 1

Book 1 Summary

Seeking inspiration from the Muse, the narrator begins to tell the tale of Odysseus, who was trapped on his way home after the Trojan War. While all the other soldiers have returned home, Odysseus is being held on the island of Ogygia by the goddess, Calypso. While being held captive, his home is being invaded by suitors looking to marry the supposedly widowed Penelope, Odysseus's wife. They hope to marry her, take over Odysseus's fortune, and reign as King of Ithaca. Meanwhile, Odysseus's son, Telemachus, is frustrated with the suitors, and is coming to the conclusion that his father will not be returning home to take care of the situation.

While the suitors are eating Odysseus out of house and home, the Gods discuss what to do with the situation. Athena reminds Zeus of how Odysseus has honored him throughout the years, and so Zeus agrees to let Athena help Telemachus. She arrives disguised as a soldier and encourages Telemachus to tell the suitors that they are no longer welcome. She also encourages him to travel to Pylos to find out if there is any news of his father.

Later, Telemachus and the suitors are listening to the harpist play a song describing the plight of the Greek men returning from Troy. Penelope comes down from her chamber and asks him to sing something else. Telemachus, however, tells her that many others suffered losses after Troy and to return to her room. Shocked, she returns upstairs and cries herself to sleep. Meanwhile, Telemachus tells the men that he will be calling an assembly of the men in Ithaca so that they will be ordered to leave his home. Many of the suitors take issue with Telemachus's comments, especially Antinous and Eurymachus, and they ask about the visitor from earlier that afternoon. Though he believes he spoke to a goddess, Telemachus tells the men that it was an old friend of Odysseus.

Book 1 Analysis

Though the book begins with the narrator's telling us the poem will be about the brave Odysseus, we are first introduced to Telemachus, Odysseus' son. We find that Odysseus has been gone for almost 20 years, and Telemachus is torn between his youth and having to grow up to protect his father's household. We are introduced to Odysseus's honor through the reminder Athena gives Zeus, and we see that Telemachus shares his beliefs and honor of the gods. We see Telemachus being led by the goddess Athena into his manhood as he follows her lead to stand up to the suitors and even his mother.

Also introduced is the influence the gods have over the lives of the humans in the story. Athena is a goddess who values the warrior and valiant men of the story, Odysseus and Telemachus. We see that although the gods are all-knowing, men are subject to the whims and moods of the gods.

Book 2

Book 2 Summary

Telemachus keeps his word and calls an assembly the next morning. He is praised by Aegyptius, an elder, who states that he is stepping into his father's shoes. This is the first assembly called since Odysseus left for Troy. Telemachus then pleads with the men to forbid the suitors from returning to his house because they are destroying his home. He rebukes the suitors for eating the best livestock and drinking all their wine and tells them that they are crude and indecent. He believes them to be cowards or else they would have already gone to Penelope's father, Icarius, to ask for Penelope's hand in marriage.

However, the suitors disagree with Telemachus and put the blame for their behavior on Penelope. Antinous states that she has seduced them into believing that she will marry one of them but then refuses to make a commitment. He relates the story of how she promised to choose a husband once she finished weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law. They would watch her weave each day, and then each night she would sneak downstairs and undo her work. Eventually, they caught her, and now the men believe that she must choose a suitor. He calls for Penelope to be sent back to her father so he may choose a husband for her. However, Telemachus disagrees and calls upon the gods to punish the suitors. In response, the gods send two battling eagles to fly over the men. Halisthereses, an older prophet, tells the men that it means Odysseus is returning and the suitors will face certain death if they return to Odysseus's house. However, the men laugh at the old prophet.

Telemachus leaves the assembly frustrated that no decision was reached. Despite the men's statements that Telemachus will find no one to assist him on his mission, Athena (in disguise as Mentor) tells Telemachus to prepare for his trip while she drums up a crew. He tells them to stock up supplies for the trip, but he tells only his trusted nurse, Eurycleia, what he is doing. She worries for him, but he tells her that the

gods are behind him.

Book 2 Analysis

Telemachus continues to follow in Odysseus' footsteps by calling an assembly and confronting the suitors. Despite his movement into manhood, the suitors still see him as a boy and refuse to move out of his home until Penelope makes a decision.

Telemachus is loyal to his mother, and refuses to let any of these men take over the throne, which is achingly empty without Odysseus. We see just how important and influential Odysseus was in Ithaca because the men would never have dreamt of being so uncouth when Odysseus was there. We also see a line drawn between the elder men of Ithaca and the younger suitors. When Halistheres interprets the eagles sent by the gods, they dismiss him as an old man, yet we also get a glimpse into what will happen to the men upon Odysseus's return.

Also introduced in this section is the concept of hospitality. This value is played out in a number of chapters throughout the epic story. Telemachus, like the older men, believes in showing hospitality to visitors, but he pleads with the older men to help control the suitors, who are rudely taking advantage of the hospitality. Though an important virtue among the people of the age, the suitors show an ugly disregard for the hospitality shown to them.

Book 3

Book 3 Summary

Upon their arrival at Pylos, Telemachus and Athena (disguised as Mentor) are taken to a ceremony to honor Poseidon. They are brought to Nestor, the king, and Telemachus asks him about Odysseus. He tells Telemachus that he does not know where Odysseus is since they went their separate ways when Agamemnon and Menelaus separated. He explained that the two brothers argued about making sacrifices to the gods before leaving, and he left with Menelaus while Agamemnon and Odysseus stayed to make sacrifices. He sympathizes with Telemachus' situation because he has heard that Odysseus' house has been taken over by the suitors. He tells Telemachus that he hopes he will achieve the same vengeance that Orestes achieved when he killed the man who murdered his father.

Telemachus asks about Orestes, and Nestor tells of how Agamemnon was murdered by Aegisthus, who was having an affair with Agamemnon's wife while Agamemnon was fighting in Troy. To prevent Aegisthus from taking over Agamemnon's kingdom, Orestes returned from exile to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, his mother. To encourage Telemachus, he sends Pisistratus to assist Telemachus on his trip to Sparta to find out more about Odysseus. As they are going to bed, Athena, as Mentor, tells them that she will return to the ship to assist the crew, and she turns into an eagle upon leaving them.

Book 3 Analysis

Telemachus begins his own odyssey on Pylos trying to find out information about his father. He is welcomed warmly by the King and listens as his father is praised. Nestor offers Telemachus important advice through the story of Agamemnon that he should not leave his home for too long, or it may end up being lost. Nestor tells the story of Agamemnon and Menelaus in a way that the reader must be familiar with them.

Homer uses the stories to further the current saga and to give the reader some foreshadowing about the suitors.

Athena uses disguises throughout the story to guide the heroes in the direction she knows that they must go. Disguise was a frequent tool of the gods, and it offered them a means to communicate with mortals. However, disguise will also be important later in the story, and it becomes a tool for Odysseus, too.

Book 4

Book 4 Summary

Upon their arrival in Sparta, Menelaus and Helen welcome Telemachus and Pisistratus while they celebrate the marriages of both their son and daughter. They recognize Telemachus immediately as Odysseus's son. They fill Telemachus' head with tales of Odysseus's clever handling of many battles at Troy. Helen tells Telemachus of how Odysseus dressed as a beggar to get inside the city while Menelaus gives Odysseus the credit for the Trojan Horse that allowed the Greeks to infiltrate Troy. He then tells Telemachus of how, when stranded in Egypt, Menelaus captured the old man of the sea, Proteus. Proteus told him that Odysseus was still alive and being held by Calypso. Telemachus, encouraged by this story, returns with Pisistratus to Pylos and then sets sail for Ithaca.

While Telemachus is finding out that his father is still alive, the suitors plot to attack Telemachus upon his arrival back at the house in Ithaca. Medon overhears the men, and reports the plot to Penelope, who becomes fraught with grief that she may now lose her son, too. However, Athena sends a phantom in the form of Iphthime to console Penelope. Her phantom sister tells Penelope that the goddess Athena will protect Telemachus, so she must not worry. Penelope asks about Odysseus, but the phantom tells her that she will not speak of him.

Book 4 Analysis

We continue to gain background through Menelaus and Helen's stories. They fill in the blanks as to Odysseus' travels and give the reader and Telemachus some history regarding his father. We learn more about how clever Odysseus is and what he is capable of doing to survive and win. We also begin to see the deep differences between Telemachus and the uncivilized suitors. While Telemachus shares the values of those he is visiting through honoring hospitality and showing guests kindness, the

suitors take advantage of the hospitality given to them in Odysseus' home. Telemachus is appreciative of those who offer him food and a bed, while the suitors plot behind his back to kill him. Loyalty to Odysseus will ultimately determine Medon's fate later on.

Again, hospitality plays a role in the story. We will see its frequent use throughout the story, but here it is important since it defines the difference in holding the value in respect, as Telemachus does, and abusing the kindness of others, as the suitors do. We also see Athena again don a disguise to console Penelope. Still, Athena will not interfere so much as to tell Penelope whether or not Odysseus is still alive.

Book 5

Book 5 Summary

The gods come together on Mount Olympus to discuss what to do with Odysseus, though Poseidon is not present because he remains in Ethiopia. Athena offers an impassioned speech about Odysseus, and Zeus agrees to assist him. He sends Hermes to Calypso with the message that she is to set Odysseus free. Calypso is at first resistant, frustrated that the male gods are able to have affairs with mortals while the female gods are prevented from doing the same. However, she relents and allows Odysseus to leave. Since Odysseus' crew has been killed off through his various adventures and he has no boats left, Calypso helps him build a new boat and gives him the supplies he needs for his journey home.

Odysseus sees the island of the Phaeacians, Scheria, after 18 days at sea. However, Poseidon returns from Ethiopia to see that the other gods have let Odysseus go without his input. He creates a large storm, which nearly kills Odysseus, but the goddess Ino creates a veil to cover Odysseus that protects him after his ship is destroyed. Athena also offers him protection as he is thrown from the deep sea against the jagged rocks along the coastline. He comes upon a river, which enables him to swim to shore. He then throws the veil back into the water as Ino told him to do when he was through with it. He then walks into the protection of the forest.

Book 5 Analysis

We continue to see the influence of the gods over the lives of mortals. Though the gods are immortal, we also see that they manipulate situations to fit their needs, like not inviting Poseidon to discuss what to do with Odysseus. Also, we see the difference between men and women in the reality among mortal men and in the world of the gods. While Calypso loves Odysseus, she is forced by the gods to let him go. She gives a speech denouncing the ability of women to act in the same manner as men or

male gods. While men are allowed to be promiscuous and unfaithful to their wives, women must remain absolutely faithful and never stray from their husbands. This is also apparent in the denunciation of Penelope for her allowing the suitors to live in her home and pursue her. We also see the conflict among the gods regarding Odysseus. While some are helping him, others are hindering him through his travels. Again, Odysseus is subject to the whims of the gods and is both virtually destroyed and then saved by two gods at odds in their goals for Odysseus.

Book 6

Book 6 Summary

Later that evening, Athena comes to the Phaeacian princess, Nausicaa, in the form of a friend. She tells the princess to wash her clothes in the river the next morning so that she will appear more desirable to any suitors who may come. Nausicaa follows the advice of Athena, and she and her handmaidens bathe and wash their clothes in the river. While the group of women is bathing, Odysseus wakes and comes upon them. With no clothes and no ship, he pleads with the women for their assistance. Nausicaa gives Odysseus time alone to bathe, and Athena blesses him with a glow to appear more handsome to Nausicaa. She finds herself falling in love with him. However, she wishes to avoid causing a scene by appearing with him in the city, so she tells Odysseus how to get to the palace. She also advises him on how to approach Arete when he comes to meet her. Odysseus then says a prayer to Athena for the good hospitality from the Phaeacians and makes his way to the palace.

Book 6 Analysis

We continue to get insight into Odysseus through his behavior in this chapter. Despite his difficulty at the hands of Poseidon, he does not give up his desire to return home. He shows his character trait of thinking things through and being shrewd and cunning. Though a powerful warrior, we also recognize Odysseus to be smart and honorable by his interactions with Nausicaa. He is a careful thinker who weighs his options when faced with situations like whether or not to approach Nausicaa when he first comes upon her or talk to her from afar.

Athena's protection of Odysseus continues in this chapter. She allows him in one moment to be appealing to Nausicaa and then virtually invisible to the people of the town. We also see Odysseus's strong belief in the gods' impact on his life through his prayer to Athena.

Book 7

Book 7 Summary

While heading to the palace to meet Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, Athena appears to Odysseus in the form of a young girl who offers to guide him to the palace. She surrounds Odysseus in a protective mist that keeps the Phaeacians from seeing him as a stranger. The Phaeacians are kind, but they do not look kindly on foreigners. She tells him to make his plea for assistance to Arete, the queen, for she will know how to assist him in getting back to Ithaca. Upon arriving at the palace, Athena leaves to return to Athens.

Upon entering the palace, Odysseus sees that they are holding a festival for Poseidon. It is an opulent palace that awes Odysseus. When he comes upon the queen, he bows down at her feet and the mist surrounding him is lifted. Alcinous wonders if the man is a god, but Odysseus reassures him that he is a mortal. He still does not reveal his identity, though. He tells the queen and king about his need to get home, and they offer him a ship to move him along on his quest.

That evening, the king and queen are alone with Odysseus, and Arete recognizes the clothes that Odysseus is wearing as Nausicaa's. She questions Odysseus as to where he got the clothes, and Odysseus tells them the story of his travels from Calypso's island to where he met Nausicaa. He never reveals his name, nor does he tell them that Nausicaa was the one who did not want him accompanying her to the palace. Instead, he tells them that it was his idea to come on his own. Alcinous is very impressed by Odysseus, so much so that he offers Nausicaa's hand in marriage.

Book 7 Analysis

Again, the gods work in Odysseus's favor since Athena disguises Odysseus as he walks through town. She does not reveal herself to Odysseus, though. It is with her

guidance, however, that Odysseus is able to gain the acceptance of the queen. Also, we continue to see Odysseus' cunning since he does not reveal his identity yet. He bides his time and withholds who he is until the time is right.

There is some irony to the story that the Phaeacians are holding a ceremony for Poseidon, which is the one god who is trying to destroy Odysseus. Still, he holds Poseidon in a position of honor and participates in the ceremonies. He also understands the importance of his disguise. Again, Odysseus shows his cunning by not revealing himself to the people.

Book 8

Book 8 Summary

The next morning, Alcinous calls an assembly of his Phaeacian counselors. Athena returns to spread the word that the discussion will concern the mysterious visitor, and it ensures that all the men will attend. Alcinous asks the men to approve giving the visitor a ship so that he may return home. The men approve, and Alcinous invites the men to a feast and games at his home to honor the visitor. Demodocus, a blind bard, begins to sing of the disagreement between Odysseus and Achilles at Troy. While everyone enjoys the song, Odysseus weeps quietly at the memories the song stirs up. The king notices that the song is not bringing Odysseus any pleasure, so he quickly ends the feast and announces the beginning of the games.

The games, such as boxing, wrestling, racing, and discus throwing begin. Though invited to participate, Odysseus declines because he is still weak from his travels. However, Broadsea, one of the younger athletes, taunts Odysseus. With his pride injured, Odysseus participates and easily wins the discus toss. He then challenges the other athletes to any other competition. The conversation becomes heated, so Alcinous steps in to calm everyone down. He invites them all to another feast, where the young Phaeacian men sing and dance for Odysseus. Demodocus performs again, and sings a song about Ares and Aphrodite. The men then present Odysseus with gifts to help him on his travels home.

At dinner, Odysseus asks Demodocus to sing of the Trojan horse and the victory over Troy, but he cannot control his grief as Demodocus plays. Alcinous cannot wonder any longer at his visitor's identity, so he asks Odysseus to tell him who he is and where he is going.

Book 8 Analysis

Despite this visit to Alcinous' palace being a rest for Odysseus, his spirit is not at rest. He finds this a chance to rest physically, but he is still tormented by his experiences and a longing for home. However, his maturity is on display through his unwillingness to reveal himself during the time that Broadsea is taunting him. Instead, Odysseus waits until he has to defend his honor to best all the youth in Phaeacia. Though his skill causes a bit of an uproar at first, he is later honored with many gifts from the young men.

We also see more predictions of the suitors' fate through the minstrel's song of Ares and Aphrodite's affair. Like Hephaestus, Odysseus will obtain his revenge. The stories and symbolism are important to building up the moment in which the suitors are destroyed.

Book 9

Book 9 Summary

Odysseus recounts his unfortunate travels since leaving Troy. After the victory, he tells how the winds brought him and his men to Ismarus, where the Cicones lived. The men were overcome by greed, and they plundered the land until the Cicones army finally defended themselves. Odysseus loses at least 6 men per ship in this battle, but they do escape.

He then tells of how a storm sent by Zeus torments them for 9 days, bringing them to the land of the Lotus-eaters. The people there give the men the lotus fruit that causes them to become intoxicated. The fruit's effects took away the thoughts of returning home, and the men desired no more than to remain on the island and eat more fruit. Odysseus and the men that did not eat any fruit then had to drag the intoxicated men back to the ship and lock them up so that they could leave the island. After leaving the island, the crew sailed to the land of the Cyclopes, who are an uncivilized race of one-eyed giants. They came upon a cave filled with sheep and crates of milk and cheese. The men pleaded with Odysseus to take some of the food and leave quickly, but Odysseus decided to remain a little longer. The Cyclops, Polyphemus, returned and made some attempt at hospitality. When he turned hostile, he ate two of Odysseus' men and imprisoned Odysseus and his crew in a cave for future meals.

Odysseus wanted to kill the son of Poseidon right then, but he knew that none of his men could move the boulder barring the exit to the cave. He came up with a plan to escape. He hardened a staff in the fire, and upon Polyphemus' return, Odysseus got him very drunk. Polyphemus inquired about Odysseus' name, in which he replied that his name was "Nobody." When Polyphemus fell asleep, Odysseus and his men drove the staff into Polyphemus' eye, blinding the Cyclops. In response to his screams, the neighbors asked what was wrong, and Polyphemus told them, "Nobody is killing me." The men then escaped the next morning by holding on to the bellies of the sheep that

Polyphemus let out to graze, since Polyphemus could no longer see them. Once on board the ship with Polyphemus' livestock, Odysseus reveals himself to the land. An angry Polyphemus pleaded with his father, Poseidon, to avenge his misfortunes.

Book 9 Analysis

In this chapter we come to know of Odysseus' travels and how he came to be with the Phaeacians. He tells of his losses at sea, yet we also see through the recounting of his behavior how far he has come in maturity. A young, egotistical warrior full of glory from the recent victory at Troy, he puts his crew at peril through their wanderings. Though his cunning with the Cyclopes got them out of a tight bind, we also see his immaturity as he reveals himself to Polyphemus. Had he remained quiet about his name, he might not have incurred the wrath of Poseidon. We also see a cruel streak in Odysseus in this chapter since he also steals Polyphemus' prize sheep and has no problems slaughtering them even though he knows how much they meant to Polyphemus. He also meanly taunts Polyphemus as he sails away with the men.

Book 10

Book 10 Summary

Odysseus and his men leave the island of the Cyclopes to go to the land of Aeolus, who rules the winds. Aeolus gives Odysseus a bag containing all the winds, and he even brings on a westerly wind to speed up their return home. Within 10 days, Odysseus and his men can see Ithaca. However, the men believe that the bag Aeolus has given Odysseus is full of a fortune in gold and silver and out of greed tear the bag open. The winds stir up a storm and send the men back to Aeolia. However, Aeolus refuses to give them any further assistance because he now fears that the gods have turned their backs on Odysseus and are against him.

Without the winds, the crew must row to the island of the Laestrygonians. The Laestrygonians are giants led by King Antiphates and his queen who turn Odysseus' scouts into dinner. The crew runs back to the ships, but the Laestrygonians sink the ships in the harbor by launching boulders at them. Odysseus' ship is the only one that escapes. They then go on to Aeaea, where the stunning witch-goddess, Circe, resides. Circe turns Odysseus' men into pigs by drugging them. Hermes comes to Odysseus in the form of a young man, telling him that he needs to first protect himself by taking an herb called moly. Odysseus then overtakes Circe, forcing her to change his men back to humans. He and Circe become lovers, and he and the men reside with Circe for a year. The men finally convince Odysseus that they must return home, so he asks Circe how to get back to Ithaca. She tells him that he must first go to Hades, where he should speak with a spirit named Tiresias.

The next morning, Odysseus gets his men together to leave. He finds out that Elpenor, the youngest of his crew, got drunk and slept on the roof the previous night. Upon hearing the men in the morning, he fell off the roof and broke his neck. Odysseus then tells the men that they must go to Hades to find out the way home, much to their dismay.

Book 10 Analysis

Temptation and human weakness are highlighted in this book. When the ships get close to the shores of Ithaca, the men succumb to temptation by opening up the bag of winds. We also see that Odysseus is beginning to face the consequences of his past behavior. Though Odysseus uses cunning and dishonesty to save his men, he now is facing the destruction of his crew. We also see Odysseus' immaturity through his affair with Circe and the lack of care for his men during this time. While the men face the humiliation of having been turned into pigs by the goddess, Odysseus enjoys becoming her lover. It is the first time we hear the men criticize Odysseus, and we see a younger, more egotistical warrior. It will form a stark contrast to the mature Odysseus we meet in later books.

Here we see the twist on disguise. While most of the gods can change themselves into other people or creatures to further their goals, Circe turns the men into pigs. The symbolism of pigs is not lost on the reader, for it is reflective both of the men's behavior and Circe's opinion of them.

Book 11

Book 11 Summary

Odysseus then sails to the River of Ocean in the land of the Cimmerians. He does as Circe has told him, and pours libations and conducts sacrifices to attract the souls of the dead. Elpenor appears and pleads with Odysseus to return to the island of Circe to bury him properly. Then Tiresias appears, telling Odysseus that Poseidon is wreaking vengeance on the men for blinding Polyphemus. He also tells Odysseus that he will eventually return home where he will save his wife and home from the destruction of the suitors. He will then leave again to appease Poseidon. However, he gives Odysseus a warning to not touch the flocks of the Sun when he arrives on Thrinacia. If he does, then he will suffer much more and lose his crew before he returns home. After Tiresias departs, Odysseus is able to speak with Anticleia, who tells him what is going on at Ithaca. He also has a number of discussions with other men listening to them recount their lives and deaths.

At this point in his story, Odysseus asks the Phaeacians if he may go to bed to rest. However, the king and queen ask him to continue, wondering whether he met any of the other men who fell at Troy. He tells them how he met Agamemnon, who tells of how he died through the betrayal of his wife. He also meets Achilles, who inquires of his son, Neoptolemus. Odysseus tells them of how he wanted to speak to Ajax, who killed himself after losing a battle with Odysseus, but Ajax refuses to speak with him. He also tells the Phaeacians of the punishments he witnessed, like Sisyphus eternally trying to push a boulder over a hill, but which rolls back down when he reaches the top. He also tells them of Tantalus, who is tormented by hunger as grapes are dangled in front of him only to be pulled away when he grabs for them. When he is thirsty and bends down to drink, the water sinks out of reach. However, Odysseus becomes overwhelmed by the number of souls wishing to know what is going on with their living relatives, and he retreats to his ship.

Book 11 Analysis

In this chapter we see a turning point for the younger Odysseus. In meeting with the dead in Hades, he hears the prophecy of Tiresias and takes it seriously. He is reminded that he is a leader and needs to return home. Homer also shows us how privileged Odysseus is, since most mortals would not be allowed into Hades unless they were dead. The break in the story reveals little, but it does allow the reader to take in for a moment what Odysseus has gone through. We are then brought back into his story to again be reminded of the rich Greek mythology of which Odysseus is soon to become a part. We are also introduced to the inner workings of the characters who were so hungry for war in *The Iliad*.

Elphenor's pleading with Odysseus to return to Circe's island and bury him shows a deeply rooted desire for tradition. The Greeks believed that a soul could not cross over until the body was properly buried, which will play a more important role when the suitors are slaughtered.

Book 12

Book 12 Summary

Odysseus keeps his promise and returns to Aeaea to bury Elpenhor. He spends a night with Circe, and she tells him of the hardships he will face on his return home. He tells the men of Circe's advice as they set sail. When they come upon the island of the sirens, he has the men plug their ears with beeswax and has them bind him to the mast of the ship so he alone will be able to hear the Sirens' song. As they pass the island, Odysseus pleads to be released as he falls under the spell of the song. However, the men only bind him tighter.

Once they are safely past the island, the crew must move through the straits between Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla is a six-headed monster that swallows one sailor for each head, while Charybdis is a giant whirlpool that will take the entire ship. As Circe instructed, they remain close to Scylla's cliffs. As they watch the whirlpool circling on the other side of the strait, Scylla comes down and eats six of the sailors.

After making it through the straits, they come to Thrinacia, the island of the sun. Remembering the warning given to him by Tiresias, he tells the men that he wants to avoid the island completely. However, Eurylochus persuades him to stop, so the men can rest. A violent storm keeps them on the island for a month, and the men survive on the provisions from the ship. However, those supplies run out, and Eurylochus convinces the men to slaughter the cattle on the island for food. While Odysseus sleeps, they kill the cattle, prompting the Sun to plead with Zeus to punish Odysseus and his crew. As they sail away from the island, Zeus creates a storm, which kills the entire crew--just as Tiresias predicted. Odysseus survives, and the storms sends him back to Charybdis, where he barely escapes. He then reaches Ogygia, the island where Calypso lives. At this point, Odysseus refrains from telling any more of the story because he does not feel he needs to re-tell what happened on Ogygia.

Book 12 Analysis

Odysseus begins to mature as the story continues, and honor is important among Greeks. He returns to Aeaea to bury Elphenor, yet we also see some of what Calypso had lamented in earlier chapters because Odysseus feels no remorse for sleeping with Circe while his wife grieved for him at home. We also see Odysseus's maturity in his willingness to follow Circe's advice to get past the Sirens. His binding to the mast and pleading to be released are symbolic of the men's travels home. While facing their temptations, the men are bound to their journey. We also see Odysseus' torment when he has to choose between the two perils in the straits. He ultimately chooses the path that will lead to fewer deaths, but he wishes he had not. This chapter again displays the human tendency toward temptation. Though Odysseus was tempted by the Sirens, he knew how to get around the temptation. On the other hand, his naive belief that his men will not fall into temptation on the island of the sun fails him. He sails on, knowing that his crew is doomed. We are then returned to the island of Ogygia, where we know Odysseus is held prisoner by Calypso.

Book 13

Book 13 Summary

Odysseus is looking forward to leaving Scheria, and the next day Alcinous prepares the ship that will take Odysseus back to Ithaca. The ship sets sail that evening, and Odysseus sleeps through the trip to Ithaca. The Phaeacian crew carries the still-sleeping Odysseus and his gifts ashore, and then they return home. Poseidon sees Odysseus back in Ithaca, and requests permission from Zeus to punish the Phaeacians for helping Odysseus. Zeus allows him to do so, and as the Phaeacian ship returns to port, it turns into stone and sinks. The Phaeacians watching the incident recognize it as the fulfillment of the prophecy and vow to do away with their custom of helping wayward travelers.

Meanwhile, Odysseus awakens to find himself in what he thinks is a foreign country because Athena has placed a mist over it to keep its identity from Odysseus. She begins planning for his next direction while Odysseus curses the Phaeacians for leaving him in a foreign country. Athena appears to Odysseus in the form of a shepherd and tells him that he really is in Ithaca. Odysseus moves to keep his identity from her until she reveals her identity to him. Pleased, Athena tells Odysseus that he needs to return home to punish the suitors. She instructs him to go to the swineherd, Eumaeus. She also tells Odysseus that Telemachus has left in search of news of him. She then disguises him as an old vagabond so that no one will know who he is.

Book 13 Analysis

While Homer has spent the last few chapters recounting the past to the reader, he now shifts the focus of the story to the present. We see that Odysseus appreciates the hospitality of the Phaeacians, but does not worry much about them. We also see the first exception to the value of hospitality when Zeus allows the punishment of the Phaeacians for helping Odysseus. This punishment shows how fragile the egos of the

gods are, and that a value so often praised and rewarded can be turned into something punishable should it bruise the ego of any god. Our focus changes with Odysseus' desire to seek revenge on the suitors taking over his home. By disguising the island at first, Athena is able to plot with Odysseus how to take back his palace, and again, disguise plays an important role in the story.

Book 14

Book 14 Summary

Odysseus goes to Eumaeus, who does not recognize him but invites Odysseus in anyhow. Odysseus listens to Eumaeus tell grand stories of Odysseus. Eumaeus tells the disguised Odysseus of how he worries that Odysseus is lost forever and how much he dislikes the group of suitors who have taken over the house. Odysseus offers the prediction that Eumaeus will see his master again soon, but Eumaeus dismisses the idea. He has been taken advantage of on too many occasions where vagabonds have come with lies about Odysseus in exchange for Penelope's charity. However, Eumaeus allows this new guest to remain for the night and even lets him have a cloak to protect him from the cold. When Eumaeus inquires about Odysseus' identity, Odysseus lies and tells him that he is from Crete. He explains that he fought with Odysseus in Troy, and that he was currently on a trip to Egypt that went bad. Now he lives in poverty. He tells Eumaeus that it was during this trip to Egypt that he learned of Odysseus' still being alive.

Book 14 Analysis

Disguise continues to be important to Odysseus, and it actually is imperative that people not know that Odysseus has returned. It allows Odysseus to know who his allies are, and Eumaeus proves to be one of them. It is significant that Odysseus remains in Eumaeus' home because it steers the reader away from Odysseus' egotistical behavior in prior books and brings us back to the mature Odysseus, who values loyalty over social status. Loyalty is another important virtue to Odysseus, and it will play a role in determining the fate of many people in his palace later.

Book 15

Book 15 Summary

Athena speeds to Sparta where Telemachus and Pisistratus are asleep in the palace of Menelaus. She comes to Telemachus in a dream telling him that he needs to return to Ithaca quickly because she fears the suitors will win his mother's hand in marriage. She tells him that they are planning to ambush him and reveals how to avoid it. Also, she advises him to go first to Eumaeus' home when he arrives, and Eumaeus will tell Penelope of his safe return. After waking, Telemachus tells Menelaus and Helen that he has to return home and accepts the gifts that they bestow. As he leaves, an eagle carrying a goose flies down beside him, and Helen believes it is an omen that Odysseus is about to come home and have his revenge on the suitors.

After Telemachus and Pisistratus arrive at Pylos, Telemachus tells Pisistratus that he has no time to visit Nestor again. Just as he is about to set sail, Theoclymenus, the descendant of a famous prophet who is running from a manslaughter charge in Argos, asks Telemachus if he can join him. Telemachus agrees and also offers him a place to stay in Ithaca.

Meanwhile, Odysseus tells Eumaeus that he will leave in the morning, hoping that Eumaeus will then offer to have him stay. He tells Eumaeus that he will earn his keep by working for the suitors, but Eumaeus warns that working for those suitors would be suicide. Eumaeus tells Odysseus how he came to Ithaca. He was the stolen son of a king, traveling the world with the pirates who kidnapped him. When they arrived in Ithaca, Odysseus's father, Laertes, bought him. Odysseus' mother then raised him alongside her youngest daughter.

The next morning, Telemachus arrives in Ithaca and leaves the ship prior to getting to the city. He asks a loyal crewman to watch over Theoclymenus. As Telemachus turns to leave, a hawk flies over carrying a dove. Theoclymenus interprets it as a sign of the

strength of Odysseus' house and lineage.

Book 15 Analysis

Athena continues her pursuit to assist Odysseus, and she moves to bring Telemachus back home. He has fulfilled the purpose of his trip, which was to make a name for himself. Though much of the poem so far has been about the internal human struggle, we see Athena's contrasting desire to make sure that Telemachus' name will be renowned, for Athena's focus is on the glory of the warrior. We also see a bit of Odysseus' character through the omens presented throughout the story. Again, we see a predatory bird being the representation of Odysseus while the suitors are portrayed as the helpless prey. It shows Odysseus' strength and predicts the ultimate end to the suitors. It is yet another example of the foreshadowing of the suitors' ultimate deaths.

Book 16

Book 16 Summary

Telemachus comes to Eumaeus' hut to find him talking to Odysseus, though he sees his father only as a strange man. Eumaeus tells Telemachus Odysseus' fabricated story, asks Telemachus to allow the stranger to stay with him at the palace, but Telemachus is afraid of what the suitors will do to the stranger. Eumaeus then exits to tell Penelope that her son has returned.

Alone with his son, Athena appears to Odysseus and asks him to come outside. Upon re-entering the hut, Athena removes his disguise. At first, Telemachus cannot believe what he is seeing, but soon the men embrace and weep. Odysseus tells Telemachus what has happened so far with the Phaeacians, and he begins discussing how he will destroy the suitors. He plans to disguise himself as a beggar, and Telemachus will hide weapons where the suitors cannot reach them. Then the two of them will seize the weapons from within the house and slaughter the lot.

Before Eumaeus can get to Penelope to tell of Telemachus' return, the ship's messenger returns to tell them all that Telemachus is back. The suitors are upset that their plot to ambush him failed, and they begin to plot against him again. Antinous wants to kill Telemachus before he can call another assembly to tell the men of the suitors' schemes. Amphinomus, however, tells them to wait for a sign from the gods before they make another move. Penelope confronts Antinous later and reprimands him harshly for plotting against Telemachus. Eurymachus then tries to calm Penelope by lying to her and offering a false concern for her son.

Book 16 Analysis

It is important that Odysseus and Telemachus meet outside the palace. Social norms would not have allowed them to meet within the palace walls because their

conversation would have raised questions about Odysseus' identity. Again, we will see how important disguise is to furthering Odysseus' plan to rid his home of the leech-like suitors. Homer also begins to differentiate suitors in this book. We see the rash suitors that want to kill Telemachus, represented in Antinous and Eurymachus, and the other group of suitors who want to wait things out, represented by Amphinomus. We find that Homer makes the plot more complex by making the villains of the story less one-dimensional. He removes the simplicity of justification for killing the suitors and adds a human element to the plot.

Book 17

Book 17 Summary

Telemachus leaves Odysseus and returns home to an emotional welcome from his mother and nurse. He meets Theoclymenus and Piraeus, and tells Piraeus not to bring any of the gifts they received from Menelaus to the palace because he believes the suitors will steal them should they manage to kill him. Telemachus relates a small amount of the information he gained regarding Odysseus. However, he does not tell her that he has seen Odysseus at Eumaeus' home. Theoclymenus voices his belief that Odysseus is in Ithaca.

At the same time, Eumaeus and Odysseus go into town. They encounter Melanthius, who is a servant to the suitors. He taunts Eumaeus and kicks Odysseus, who appears to Melanthius as a beggar. When they arrive at the palace, Odysseus is treated just as poorly by the suitors. They reluctantly give him food, and Antinous insults him. Odysseus insults him back, and then Antinous hits Odysseus so hard with a stool that even the other suitors find it unseemly. Penelope hears of the actions against the stranger, and she asks that he be brought to her so that she can ask him about Odysseus. However, Odysseus does not want to be seen heading to Penelope's room. Eumaeus then tells them that he must return to his home and leaves Odysseus in the palace.

Book 17 Analysis

The aspect of hospitality again moves to the forefront in this book. While Telemachus finds a warm welcome from his mother upon his return, Odysseus finds a cold, angry group of suitors when he comes to the palace. We see that the suitors, and even their servants, do not hold to an important, character-driven virtue in showing hospitality. So while they live on the hospitality of Telemachus and Penelope, they will not show it to another visitor. We are also drawn deeper into social norms, and what is

considered proper behavior. Even the other suitors find Antinous' treatment of Odysseus in bad form.

Book 18

Book 18 Summary

A beggar, Irus, arrives at the palace, and he challenges Odysseus to a boxing match. Since Odysseus is disguised as an old man, he thinks that he will easily win the fight. However, Odysseus has been granted extra strength by Athena, and Irus tries to escape. However, the suitors find the fight entertaining. The boxing match quickly ends with Odysseus beating Irus to a point where he almost kills him.

The suitors congratulate Odysseus, and Amphinomus toasts to him and gives him food. Odysseus feels for Amphinomus and pulls him aside. Odysseus knows that the suitors will all soon be killed, so he warns Amphinomus that Odysseus soon will return. Amphinomus does not leave but remains despite his own feelings of doom. Athena has already made sure that all the suitors will die at the hands of Telemachus, even Amphinomus.

Athena gives Penelope the idea to go down and speak to her suitors. She grants Penelope extra grace and beauty to touch the suitors' hearts. Penelope leads the suitors on by telling them that Odysseus had told her, should he not return, to take a new husband before Telemachus grew facial hair. She tricks the suitors into bringing her gifts by telling them that any worthy suitors would woo her by giving her things rather than taking what is already hers. This guile impresses Odysseus, but the fooled suitors bring numerous gifts to Penelope and celebrate her decision. Meanwhile, Odysseus tells the maidservants to go to Penelope, but the maidservant Melantho (who is Melanthius' sister) tells him that he is beneath her and a drunk. Odysseus frightens her with threats. Athena spurs Eurymachus to insult Odysseus, hoping it will make him more angry. It works, as Odysseus tosses insults back at him, and Eurymachus throws a stool at Odysseus, which misses and hits a servant. A virtual riot ensues, and Telemachus has to calm the men, frustrating the suitors.

Book 18 Analysis

Odysseus's fistfight with Irus is a direct parallel to what will happen with the suitors later in the story. Only Amphinomus seems to see the possibility, and he is filled with dread at the thought. However, we also see the gods' decisions as absolute in the Greek world, and even though Odysseus has pity on Amphinomus, he will not escape Athena's punishment. Again, by associating himself with the more poorly behaved suitors, he has injured the pride of the gods. We, too, begin to see more of Penelope's cunning and the possibility of her being a more suitable match for her husband in her cunning with the suitors. Athena's interference also plays an important role in furthering the destruction of the suitors.

Book 19

Book 19 Summary

When the suitors go to sleep that night, Telemachus and Odysseus move forward with their plan and remove all the weapons with Athena lighting their way. Telemachus then goes to bed while Penelope comes from her room to meet the stranger, who is Odysseus. She questions his honesty, asking him to describe her husband, and he does intricately. Penelope starts to cry as Odysseus relates how he, as the beggar, met Odysseus and then came to Ithaca. He tells her that Odysseus had a difficult journey, but he is alive and predicts that he will return within a month.

Grateful, Penelope offers Odysseus a bed, but he declines, saying he is used to sleeping on the floor. He reluctantly allows Eurycleia to wash his feet, but she embraces Odysseus when she recognizes the scar on his foot from when he went boar hunting with his grandfather, Autolycus. He tells her to keep quiet about his secret while Athena distracts Penelope so she will not catch on. Eurycleia agrees to keep his secret.

Penelope tells Odysseus about a dream she had where an eagle flew down and killed 20 of her geese. It then perched on her roof and told her that it was her husband who put her lovers to death. Penelope tells the beggar that she is confused as to its meaning, and Odysseus takes on the challenge and explains the dream to her. Penelope tells him that she will still choose a new husband, who is to be the first man to shoot an arrow through the holes of 12 axes set in a line. This is a feat achieved only by Odysseus himself.

Book 19 Analysis

We again wonder in this book if Odysseus' identity will be revealed to all and his plot ruined. Throughout this half of the book many people refer to him as being

remarkably like Odysseus, and Homer keeps us in suspense as to whether or not he will be found out before his plot comes to fruition. We are also confronted again with yet another omen in Penelope's dream. Yet the graphic violence of this dream tells us that the end is very near for the suitors. Again, we are reminded that Odysseus is now the predatory bird while the suitors are just fodder for the hunter.

Book 20

Book 20 Summary

Neither Penelope nor Odysseus sleeps well. Odysseus is concerned about whether he and Telemachus will be able to defeat the large number of suitors, but Athena tells him that the gods make all things possible. On the other hand, Penelope is bothered by the loss of Odysseus and this new commitment to marry again. She prays for Artemis to kill her. Odysseus wakes to her distressed prayers and prays to Zeus for a good omen. Zeus hears his prayers and sends a clap of thunder, causing a maid to curse the suitors.

Odysseus and Telemachus meet Eumaeus and then Melanthius, a foul individual. They also run into Philoetius, a loyal herdsman who tells them that he has not given up on Odysseus's return. Meanwhile, the suitors are still plotting Telemachus' murder. Amphinomus convinces the men to stop pursuing the idea of murdering Telemachus just as an eagle carrying a dove in its talons appears--an omen of the coming doom. To keep Odysseus angry enough to punish the suitors, she keeps the men antagonistic. After one comment, Ctesippus throws a cow's hoof at Odysseus, prompting Telemachus to threaten to kill Ctesippus. The suitors find this comment hilarious, and in their laughter do not see that they all now have a ghostly look about them and that the walls are now covered in blood. Theoclymenus predicts that these omens mean certain doom for the suitors.

Book 20 Analysis

This book serves to set the scene for the battle. We know by the restlessness of Odysseus and Penelope that the end is nearing. We also see even more omens predicting the end to the suitors, including the gruesome scene at dinner. The increasing severity of the omens and the thunder of Zeus tell us that the battle will favor Odysseus, and it will happen quickly. Homer also identifies even more suitors

and negative characters whose antipathy toward Odysseus and his son serves to justify their deaths in battle.

Book 21

Book 21 Summary

Penelope brings Odysseus' bow to the suitors and tells them that she will marry the suitor who can string the bow and shoot it through the line of 12 axes. Telemachus sets up the axes and tries the bow, but he cannot string it. Despite the suitors' efforts to string the bow, none can do it.

While the suitors are trying to string the bow, Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaeus and Philoetius through the scar on his foot. He tells them that he will treat them as Telemachus' brothers if they remain on his side against the suitors. They both agree.

Odysseus returns to find Eurymachus struggling to string the bow. Eurymachus is frustrated, because his inability to string the bow makes him inferior to Odysseus. Antinous suggests that they stop for the day to make sacrifices to Apollo, and then try again the next day. Odysseus, disguised as the beggar, though, asks to try the bow. The men argue against it, and Antinous tells them that the wine must have gone to his head. He warns him that he will end up bringing disaster upon himself like the centaur Eurytion. However, Telemachus insists that Odysseus be given a chance and tells Eumaeus to give the beggar the bow. Odysseus easily strings the bow and sends the arrow through all 12 axes.

Book 21 Analysis

In this chapter, Odysseus comes full circle. He not only shows that he is Odysseus, king of Ithaca, but also that he is superior to all of the suitors. He is first treated as inferior by Eurymachus and Antinous, but then he reveals his true identity. The bow itself represents a better time in Ithaca, where things were more peaceful for Odysseus and before he endured any hardships. Penelope's cunning in challenging the suitors in this way goes to prove that only one man is her perfect match, Odysseus, for he is the

only one who had the ability to string the bow and use it.

Book 22

Book 22 Summary

Odysseus quickly turns the bow on Antinous, and shoots an arrow through his throat. At first the suitors believe it was an accident, but then Odysseus reveals himself. The suitors try to escape, but Eumaeus and Philoetius have locked all the doors. Eurymachus tries to tell Odysseus that Antinous was really the only bad suitor, but Odysseus tells them that he will not spare a single one of them. Eurymachus then runs at Odysseus only to be killed by another of Odysseus's arrow. Telemachus then kills Amphinomus with a spear.

When Telemachus goes to the storage to get more weapons for Eumaeus and Philoetius, he forgets to lock the door behind him. Melanthius gets to the storage to take some weapons for the men, but when he returns for more weapons, Eumaeus and Philoetius tie him up and lock him in the room.

As the battle rages on, Athena refrains from participating. She disguises herself as Mentor and guides Odysseus. She wants to test his strength. While Odysseus and his men kill many suitors, they receive few injuries themselves. Satisfied, Athena joins the battle. It ends quickly, with only the minstrel, Phemius, and the herald, Medon, being spared, as they were unwillingly used by the suitors. Even the priest, Leodes, is not spared, despite his pleas for mercy.

Odysseus calls for Eurycleia, who comes out celebrating the death of the suitors. However, Odysseus reprimands her for behaving improperly. He has her gather the servant women who betrayed him and makes them clean the bloodshed and bodies. After they are done, Odysseus tells Telemachus to take them out and kill them by the sword. However, Telemachus hangs them instead, for he feels they do not deserve as graceful a death. Melanthius is the last to be tortured and killed. Then Odysseus has the house fumigated.

Book 22 Analysis

The panic of the suitors is evident, yet not unexpected. They chose to ignore all the portents. Disguise is again important, because it gives Odysseus the dramatic moment to kill one man and then reveal himself to the others. As each man is killed, Homer reminds the reader of their misdeeds, as if to justify their death at Odysseus and Telemachus' hands.

Athena remains out of the fighting as much as possible to ensure that Odysseus and Telemachus gain the glory of the victory. Should she interfere too much or too early, she would be credited with winning the battle, and the two men would lose honor. Again, we see little of her care for the suitors, but instead we see that she wants to see her men honored as true warriors.

At the end of the battle, Odysseus does not rejoice in killing the men, reminding us that it was a matter of honor, not glory. He reminds Eurycleia of that when she begins celebrating. We see Odysseus's wisdom in sparing the herald and the bard, who were forced into service. His putting to death of the suitors' loyal servants shows his desire to be absolute about regaining his rightful place of King of Ithaca. He is determined to wipe them out. Telemachus' frustration with the suitors and the mistreatment he suffered is evident by his choice to hang the maidservants rather than give them the honor of dying by the sword.

Book 23

Book 23 Summary

Eurycleia goes upstairs to wake Penelope, who has slept through the entire battle. Penelope does not believe anything Eurycleia tells her, even after she comes downstairs to see her husband. Telemachus reprimands her for not embracing her husband lovingly, but Penelope is fearful that the gods are playing a trick on her. Meanwhile, Odysseus is not as worried about her reaction as he is that the noblemen of Ithaca will be very upset that he has killed their sons. He decides that the family must remain quiet for a while, and the minstrel begins a happy song so that no one outside the palace will know any different.

Still in disbelief, Penelope tells Eurycleia to move her bridal bed, and Odysseus shouts at her that the bed cannot be moved. He explains that it is built from the trunk of an olive tree around which the palace was built. From this outburst, Penelope knows this man is her husband. The two go off to find each other again, and Odysseus tells her all about his adventures. He also tells her that he has to leave once more to fulfill Tiresia's prophecy. When he leaves the next day, he tells Penelope not to leave her room or allow any visitors. Athena then covers Odysseus and Telemachus in darkness so that no one will see the two walking through town.

Book 23 Analysis

Again the Greek placement of women is apparent in this chapter. While Eurycleia is a servant, she is able to see the bloodshed in the palace without concern. However, Homer keeps Penelope asleep through the battle and cleanup as if to protect her from having to see the violence. Even so, she questions Odysseus. This questioning reminds us that the match between Penelope and Odysseus is perfect. Their minds work the same way, valuing cleverness and plotting above other matters. The bed is also symbolic of their relationship. It is made from a tree growing through the center of the

home, and it cannot be moved, just like their relationship. Despite Odysseus' wanderings, it is Penelope who truly holds his heart.

Book 24

Book 24 Summary

In Hades, Agamemnon and Achilles are arguing over who had the better death while the souls of the suitors are lead by Hermes. They see the suitors coming in, and they ask how so many noble men could have died together. Amphimedon, an acquaintance of Agamemnon, tells him the story of how they came to their end, though he puts most of the blame on Penelope. Agamemnon tells him that Penelope's constancy is quite different from the treachery of his own wife, Clytemnestra.

Meanwhile, Odysseus is at Laertes' farm in Ithaca. He asks to be left alone in the garden with his father. He is saddened that Laertes has aged so quickly out of grief for his son and Penelope. He does not recognize Odysseus, and Odysseus does not reveal himself at first. He tells his father that he once knew Odysseus and reveals himself only when his father begins to cry. He hugs and kisses his father and proves that he is Odysseus by his scar. He tells his father how he killed all the suitors.

While lunching, Dolius, the father of Melanthius and Melanthe, visits with them. The goddess, Rumor, then flies through the city telling everyone of the massacre at Odysseus's palace. The suitors' fathers hold an assembly to determine how to respond to the death of their sons. Halitherses tells them that the suitors got what they deserved, but Antinous' father, Eupithes, tells them that they should seek revenge. They march on Laertes' house, but Athena (disguised as Mentor) puts an end to the violence. Only Eupithes is killed. Athena takes away the painful memory of the massacre and allows them to recognize Odysseus as king. Peace is restored to Ithaca.

Book 24 Analysis

In Hades, we are introduced to the suitors' anger over being killed by Odysseus and how they blame it on Penelope rather than blaming themselves. It fits with their lives

on earth, where they took no responsibility for their own behavior. However, Greek mythology states that a soul cannot enter Hades unless it has a proper burial, which was why Odysseus had to return to the island to bury Elpenor earlier in the book.

Still, Homer uses this chapter to give the reader closure to the story. He resolves the anger of the parents by having Athena take away the memory, again reinforcing the importance of the gods' interference in the lives of mortals and also showing her rewarding of the warrior spirit. Though it is a simplistic way to end the story, it allows the reader to accept the peace that ensues in the end.

Characters

Achilles

Son of the mortal man Peleus and the sea goddess Thetis, Achilles is the best warrior at the siege of Troy. Odysseus encounters his shade (spirit) in the underworld in Book II while waiting for the seer Tiresias to tell him how he is to return home after being delayed for ten years.

Achilleus

See Achilles

Aeacides

See Achilles

Aeolus

The son of Hippotas, Homer describes him as "beloved of the immortal gods" (X.2) and relates that Zeus put him in charge of the winds, letting him "hold them still or start them up at his pleasure" (x'22). He and his family (six sons married to six daughters) live on Aeolia, a floating island. After listening to Odysseus's tales of Troy, he agrees to help and makes Odysseus a present of a bag containing all the adverse winds that could blow him off his proper course home. Unfortunately, Odysseus's men untie the knot, thinking they will find gold in the bag; the winds blow them back to Aeolia. Aeolus casts them out, saying he has no desire to help anyone who is so obviously cursed by the gods.

Agamemnon

Son of Atreus, brother of Menelaus, and King of Mycenae, Agamemnon commands the Achaean forces at Troy. Odysseus encounters his shade in the underworld.

Agamemnon tells him about what he (Agamemnon) found waiting for him when *he* returned home after the war, and he cautions Odysseus to be careful until he is sure of his wife's loyalty.

Aias

See Ajax

Ajax (Oilean, the Lesser)

Son of Oileus and leader of the Locrians at Troy. Shipwrecked on his way home after the war, he boasts of having escaped the sea in spite of the gods-and is subsequently drowned by Poseidon. Odysseus encounters his shade in the underworld in Book 11.

Ajax (Telamonian, the Greater)

Son of Telamon and grandson of Aeacus (who was also grandfather of Achilles), Ajax was one of the bravest and strongest fighters at Troy. At the funeral games after Achilles' s death, he and Odysseus competed for Achilles's armor and weapons. When they were awarded to Odysseus, Ajax sulked and, in a fit of madness, slaughtered a flock of sheep in the belief that they were his enemies. When he discovered what he had done, he killed himself, unable to live with the shame. Odysseus encounters the shade of Ajax in the underworld, and even apologizes for the outcome of their contest at Achilles's funeral games. Ajax, angry with Odysseus even after death, refuses to speak to the man he believes had unfairly beaten him in life.

Ajax the Greater

See Ajax (Telamonian)

Ajax the Lesser

See Ajax (Oilean)

Akhilleus

See Achilles

Alcinous

Son of Nausithous, husband of Arête and father of Nausicaa and Laodanias, Alcinous (the name means "sharp-witted" or "brave-witted") is king of Phaeacia and a grandson of Poseidon. Homer depicts him as a kind, generous, and noble man, eager to help the stranger and put him at ease (e.g., VIII.94-5, 532-34). He even suggests that Odysseus should stay in Phaeacia and marry his daughter.

Antinoos

See Antinous

Antinous

Son of Eupithes, Antinous' s name literally means "anti-mind" and could be translated as "Mindless." He is one of the boldest and most ambitious (not to say obnoxious) of the suitors for Penelope's hand. He wants to supplant Telemachus as the next ruler of

Ithaca (I.384ff.). It is his idea to attempt to ambush Telemachus on his way home from the mainland, and he proposes killing Telemachus outright at least three different times (XVI.383, XX.271-74, and XXII.49-53). He is the first man Odysseus kills in Book 22.

Aphrodite

Aphrodite is the Greek goddess of love (the equivalent of the Roman Venus). According to Homer, she is the daughter of Zeus and Dione; the poet Hesiod (who likely lived and wrote not long after Homer's time), however, claims that she sprang from the foam (*aphros* in Greek) of the sea, as seen in Botticelli's painting *The Birth of Venus* (circa 1485). She is married, though not faithful, to Hephaestus, god of fire and smithcraft. Among her many lovers was the god of war, Ares. Aphrodite appears in the *Odyssey* only by "reputation," so to speak, when Demodocus sings the story of how her husband conspired to trap her in bed with her lover Ares and expose the two of them to the ridicule of the gods (VIII.266-366).

Apollo

The son of Zeus and Leto, and twin brother of Artemis, Apollo is the god of archery, prophecy, music, medicine, light, and youth. (Sometimes, though not in Homer, Apollo is identified with the sun). As we frequently see in the *Odyssey* (e.g., III.279, IV.341, VI.162, etc.), plagues and other diseases, and sometimes a peaceful death in old age, were often explained as being the result of "gentle arrows" shot by Apollo (for men), or by his sister Artemis (for women).

Arete

Niece and wife of Alcinous and mother of Nausicaa, Arete is queen of the Phaeacians. Her name means "Virtue" or "Excellence" in Greek. Athena tells Odysseus that

Alcinous honors Arete "as no other woman on earth" is honored (VII.67).

Artemis

Daughter of Zeus and Leto, twin sister of Apollo, Artemis is the virgin goddess of the hunt, the moon, and, in some traditions, of childbirth and the young. As we frequently see in the *Odyssey* (e.g., IV.122, V.123, VI.102, etc.), plagues and other diseases, and sometimes a peaceful death in old age, were often explained as being the result of "gentle arrows" shot by Artemis (for women), or by her brother Apollo (for men).

Athena

The daughter of Zeus and Metis. Zeus (following in the tradition of his own father, Cronus) swallowed her at birth when it was revealed that she would someday bear a son who would be lord of heaven (and thus take Zeus's place). She was born, fully grown and in armor, from the head of Zeus after Hephaestus (or, in some traditions, Prometheus) split it open with an axe to relieve his headache.

Athena was revered as the patron goddess of Athens (where the temple known as the Parthenon was technically dedicated to her in her aspect as *Athena Polias*, protectress of the city), but also as a goddess of war, wisdom and cleverness, and crafts, especially weaving and spinning. She describes herself in the *Odyssey* as being "famous among all the gods for scheming and clever tricks" (XIII.299).

Athena does not behave in the same way as most of the other gods in the *Odyssey*: she is closely involved with both Odysseus and Telemachus all through the poem, whereas the other gods (with the exception of Poseidon) are more remote and rarely intervene in the affairs of mortals. Indeed, the account of Athena's interaction with Odysseus, where he finally reaches Ithaca in Book 13, reads more like an encounter between old friends or cherished family members than between a mortal and a god. Homer may have intended such closeness to underscore Odysseus's heroic status: the gods only

assist those who are worthy, and even then they tend to be somewhat distant. For Athena to treat Odysseus so familiarly indicates his superior status even among heroes.

Athene

See Athena

Atreides

See Agamemnon

Atrides

See Agamemnon

Calypso

Daughter of Atlas, who holds the world upon his shoulders, Calypso (whose name is related to the Greek verb "to hide" and which might therefore be translated as "Concealer") is a goddess who lives on the island of Ogygia. She falls in love with Odysseus during the seven years he lives on her Island (I.1S, IX.30), and proposes to make him immortal (V.136, 209): not a gift usually given lightly.

She says as much to Hennes in Book 5 when he comes to tell her of Zeus's decision that she must let Odysseus go. She is not happy with Zeus's decision, but she abides by it. She again offers to make Odysseus immortal. When he turns her down, she provides him with the materials and tools he needs to make a raft. When it is completed, she sends a favorable wind at his back that almost gets him home-until Poseidon catches sight of him.

Circe

Daughter of Helios (the sun-god) and Perse, and sister of Aeetes, the king of Coichis who plagued Jason and the Argonauts. A minor goddess who "speaks with the speech of mortals," she is also a powerful enchantress.

Her "specialty" lies in turning men into pigs (in Homer; pseudo-Apollodorus also mentions wolves, donkeys, and lions; this may be reflected in the reference to wolves and lions at x.212) by means of potions and spells. Yet once she recognizes Odysseus, and swears an oath not to harm him, she becomes the most charming of hostesses, so much so that Odysseus and his men remain with her an entire year before the crew asks Odysseus if it is not time to head for home.

Apollodorus also records the tradition that Circe bore a son, Telegonus, to Odysseus during his stay on the island. Homer merely notes (IX.32) that she wanted Odysseus to remain as her husband.

Ctesippus

A suitor from the island of Same whom Horner describes (XX.287) as "a man well-versed in villainy," though he does not specify exactly what Ctesippus has done to earn that nickname. His name literally means "Horse-Getter," so we might conclude that he was, literally, a horse-thief.

Ctesippus insults Odysseus and throws an ox-hoof at him when he goes around the hall begging on the day the suitors are killed. Odysseus ducks the missile, and Telemachus orders Ctesippus to leave the stranger alone or suffer the consequences. Ctesippus is later killed by the ox-herd Philoetius (XXII.28S).

Demodocus

The blind bard, or poet, of the Phaeacian court. Traditionally, Demodocus has been taken as representing Homer, but not all scholars accept this idea.

Demodokos

See Demodocus

Eumaeus

Son of Ctesius, who was king of two cities on the Island of Syria (not to be confused with the Middle Eastern country of the same name), Eumaeus was kidnapped at a young age by one of his father's serving women and taken by Phoenician traders, who sold him as a slave to Laertes, Odysseus's father. Odysseus's mother, Anticleia, raised him together with her own daughter, and then sent him to the country when the daughter was married (XV.366ff.). His name might mean something like "one who seeks the good." Eumaeus seems quite content with his lot in life. He remains loyal to his absent master and does his best to protect the property entrusted to his care from the depredations of the suitors. He grieves for the loss of Odysseus (XIVo40-44, etc.) no less than for his lost home and family, and when Telemachus returns from his overseas journey, Eumaeus greets him as if he were his own son (XVI.14-22).

It should be noted in passing that the sort of slavery described in the Homeric poems, while it had some aspects in common with the variety later practiced in Europe and America, is also different from the later practice in several significant respects. Chief among them is the fact that in Homer, the slave is often as much a part of the household as the son of the house, with a place within it and defined rights and privileges: Eumaeus, for example, was raised together with his masters' daughter and is both permitted and sufficiently wealthy to have a slave of his own (XIVo449-52).

Eumaios

See Eumaeus

Eurycleia

The daughter of Ops, Eurycleia is a long-time servant of Odysseus' family. Odysseus' father Laertes bought her in her youth for 20 oxen (not an insignificant price, especially for an island king with relatively little land for cattle). She was Odysseus' nurse, and then Telemachus' , and in her old age she now attends Penelope.

As with Eumaeus, although Eurycleia is a slave in the household of Odysseus and his family, there is every indication that she is loved and respected just as much as any of the "regular" members of the household. It is she whom Telemachus tells of his plans to travel to Pylos and Sparta (II.348ff.), not Penelope, and also she who comforts Penelope when the latter learns her son has been away all this time. Laertes, in his day, is said to have "favored her as much as his own devoted wife" (10432).

It should be noted in passing that the sort of slavery described in the Homeric poems, while it has some aspects in common with the variety later practiced in Europe and America (i.e., use of slaves for sexual relief, chattel ownership of one human being by another, and, to some extent, the power of life and death over one's slaves), it is also different from the later practice in several significant respects. Chief among them is the fact that in Homer, the slave is often as much a part of the household as the son of the house, with a place in it and defined rights and privileges: Eurycleia, for example, is the one to insist that Odysseus' grandfather be the one to name the new baby, and has a few suggestions of her own on that point (XIXo401ff).

Eurylochos

See Eurylochos

Eurylochos

A companion of Odysseus, Eurylochos is the one who ties Odysseus to the mast to keep him from responding-fatally-to the song of the sirens, and it is he who leads the first group of men to Circe's palace, then has to report that they have not come back out, and begs Odysseus not to make him go back (X.266-69). Eurylochos eventually turns on Odysseus and refuses to obey him on Thrinacia, where he urges the rest of the men to slaughter the sun-god's cattle (XII.339ff.).

Eurylochos

See Eurylochos

Eurymachos

See Eurymachos

Eurymachos

Son of Polybus, Eurymachos is described as the "leading candidate" for Penelope's hand (XV.1718). HIS name means "wide-fighting."

Eurymachos is shown to be arrogant, disrespectful, hypocritical, cowardly, and abusive. He is the second of the suitors to die by Odysseus's hand. Odysseus's words to him, after Eurymachos offers to make good on the damages the suitors have done to

his household in his absence, are virtually the same as Achilles's words in response to Agamemnon's offer of a ransom for Briseis in Book 9 of the *Iliad*.

Eurymakhos

See Eurymachos

Helen

Daughter of Zeus and Leda, the most beautiful woman of her time. Wife of Menelaus, Helen went, apparently willingly, with Paris to Troy: the resulting war formed the background for Homer's other epic poem, the *Iliad*.

Even in the *Iliad*, Helen was something of an enigma, a status that is still hers in the *Odyssey*. She herself tells the story of how she recognized Odysseus on a scouting mission in Troy (IV.244ff.) and announces that by that time, "my heart had already turned toward going home" (IV.260). Yet scarcely 20 lines further on, Menelaus tells of how she came by night to the Trojan Horse, accompanied by one of Priam's sons, and walked around it, calling out to the men hiding inside by name, and imitating the voice of each man's wife (IV.274-79).

One might have expected Menelaus to be angry with Helen for running off to Troy, and she with him for having dragged her back. Instead, Homer treats us to a portrait of marital bliss: Helen and Menelaus are to all appearances deeply in love with one another, and quite happy to be back in Sparta among their people and their possessions. Helen is regal and somewhat mysterious, apparently as much an advisor to Menelaus as a wife. She is understanding and compassionate as well, as evidenced by her putting soothing drugs into the wine being served around the hall as everyone is on the verge of breaking down and crying for their lost relatives (IV.220ff.).

Kalypso

See Calypso

Kirke

See Circe

Ktesippos

See Ctesippus

Laertes

Son of Arcesius (and thus a grandson of Zeus), husband of Anticleia, and father of Odysseus. Laertes was one of those (along with Menoetius, father of Patroclus; Peleus, father of Achilles; and Telamon, father of Ajax the Greater) who sailed with Jason on the Argo in the quest for the Golden Fleece, according to pseudo-Apollodorus (*Library*, 1.97).

By the time the *Odyssey* begins, however, Laertes is old and worn by care and grief. His wife has died, his son has been absent for 20 years, first at the Trojan War and then on his wanderings on his way home from it. He has retired to a country estate, where he lives more like one of the servants than the owner (XI. 187-96).

This behavior has puzzled scholars and readers for many years. Presumably, in the absence of his son and at least until Telemachus is old enough to take over, Laertes would have acted as Odysseus's regent in Ithaca, maintaining order and seeing to the safety of both the people in general and of Odysseus's household in particular. Details are sketchy in the *Odyssey*, but we do know that the suitors have only relatively

recently arrived on the scene (within three or four years, according to 11.89-90) and, while we do not know precisely when she died, that Anticleia's death was especially hard on Laertes. We may conjecture that Laertes did in fact act in Odysseus's place for most of the time he is absent, but subsequently retired to the country on the death of his wife, when the burdens of rule became too great. This retirement, of course, is also a necessary dramatic device: without it, there would be no explanation for the suitors' presence, much less their audacity, and thus no framework either for demonstrating the excellence of Telemachus and his fitness to succeed his father, or for anything more dramatic for Odysseus's homecoming than a simple announcement of his arrival.

Melanthios

See Melanthius

Melanthius

Son of Dolius, Melanthius is Odysseus's goatherd. During his master's long absence, Melanthius has become friendly with the suitors of Odysseus's wife Penelope. He insults Odysseus as Eumaeus is bringing him into town, and again on the morning of the day that Odysseus kills the suitors. He attempts to bring armor from the storeroom for the suitors once Odysseus has revealed himself, but is caught in the act by Eumaeus and imprisoned there until the end of the fighting. He is severely mutilated (and presumably dies of his wounds, though Homer is not explicit on this point) by Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Philoetius.

Menelaos

See Menelaus

Menelaus

Son of Atreus and brother of Agamemnon, Menelaus is king of Sparta and the husband of Helen. While Menelaus was extraordinarily unassuming in the *Iliad*, in the *Odyssey* he shines as an example of the happy husband and father, the good ruler, and the perfect host, who is outraged at the suggestion (IV.31-36) that he should send Telemachus and Pisistratus away, even though they have arrived in the middle of a double wedding.

One might have expected him to be bitter at Helen's betrayal, but we see no evidence of this in the *Odyssey*: quite the contrary, he seems overjoyed to have her back at home. He has his share of adventures on the way home from Troy, but unlike his older and more powerful brother Agamemnon, in whose shadow he stands throughout the *Iliad*, Menelaus returned home to a peaceful kingdom with a loving wife at his side.

Menelaus is happy to see Telemachus, who he says reminds him very much of his father Odysseus (IV.148-50), and to help him in whatever way he can. (He even offers to take the boy around central Greece, collecting gifts, an offer which Telemachus refuses, as he does several of Menelaus's own gifts, which he says he is incapable of caring for on Ithaca.) Homer tells us that because he is the husband of Helen, who is herself a daughter of Zeus, he is destined after death to be taken by the gods to the Elysian Fields.

Nausicaa

Daughter of Alcinous and Arete, Nausicaa is a Phaeacian princess. The night before Odysseus is discovered in the bushes, she dreams of her marriage: and after Athena makes him look more regal, she seems to think that Odysseus would make a suitable husband (VI.239-45): a sentiment her father echoes (VII.311-16). Her name, as with many of the Phaeacian characters, is related to the Greek word for "ship," *naus*.

Initially shy when confronted with a naked stranger, she quickly recovers her poise and remembers the rules about dealing with strangers and guests. She puts Odysseus at his ease, gives him clothing, and directions on how to find the palace and how to proceed when he is admitted. Samuel Butler suggested in *The Authoress of the Odyssey* that Nausicaa was either herself the author of the *Odyssey* or intended to represent the author of the poem, but this theory has met with almost universal skepticism.

Nausikaa

See Nausicaa

Nestor

The only surviving son of Neleus to survive, Nestor is the elderly king of Pylos, where it is said (III.245) that he has reigned over "three generations of men." As in the *Iliad*, Nestor's role is that of the elder statesman and advisor. He is longwinded and prone to telling stories about his remarkable feats in the old days (which Telemachus tries diplomatically to avoid having to listen to on his return to Ithaca at XV.200), but his advice is almost always sound, and his help is essential to Telemachus's mission.

Odysseus

Son of Laertes and Anticleia, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus, and absent King of Ithaca. In the *Iliad*, Odysseus was a first-rank character of the second rank: Important, but clearly secondary to the likes of Agamemnon, Achilles, Hector, and Ajax. He was still known for guile, tact, and diplomacy more than for courage, and there seemed to be something at least mildly sinister about his talents.

In the *Odyssey*, however, we are given an opportunity to see Odysseus at the center of

the stage, doing what he does best-getting out of difficult situations as easily as he seems to get into them-but in a much different light. Whereas In the *Iliad*, Odysseus was always trying to get someone else to do what he wanted, or what some third party wanted (e.g., the embassy to Achilles), now we see him using his wits just to stay alive, and in situations where It is quite clear that he needs every scrap of guile, intelligence, and endurance he can muster. He acts as he does because he has no choice: circumstances or the gods repeatedly force his hand.

We also see the more human side of Odysseus: his ability to inspire affection and respect in others (Penelope, Calypso, the Phaeacians, Eumaeus, etc.), his strength (even though he might not have been able to stand up to Hector in battle, he is the only one of 110 people who try to string his bow that manages to do so, and he breaks Irus's jaw with one punch), and his love for his wife and family.

Some have argued that too much of the "human" side of Odysseus shines through, that he is nothing more than a grasping, greedy, selfish, disreputable man who simply bides his time, does as little as possible to help anyone else, and always makes sure he takes care of Number One first. The seeds of this view, which stretches all the way back to the tragedian Euripides (c. 480-406 BC), are definitely present in Homer (especially in the episode with the Laestrygonians in Book 10). Nevertheless, it is not a view that Homer would be likely to accept.

Others, beginning with Dante (who puts Odysseus in Hell for wanting to know too much) and continuing through Alfred, Lord Tennyson, have seen in Odysseus the eternal wanderer, not content to rest too long in anyone place, and always seeking to learn new things. Again, there are some hints of this interpretation in Homer, but no more than that.

For Homer, Odysseus is a loyal husband, loving father, and a true hero who wants nothing more than to return to his home and his loved ones. To achieve this goal he even turns down an easy chance at immortality: not a gift which is frequently given to begin with, and not usually without a great deal of hardship in the bargain.

Oilean

See Ajax the Lesser

Pelides

See Achilles

Penelope

Daughter of Icarius, wife of Odysseus, and mother of Telemachus. Commentators have noted that Penelope is a woman in conflict: should she await the return of her long-missing husband, or remarry? Should she remain in the house she shared with Odysseus, or move on? Is she still wife, or widow?

Penelope has a rough time of it throughout most of the *Odyssey*. She cherishes memories of the past she shared with her long-absent husband. But there is nothing grim, nothing suggestive of denial, in her relationship to the past.

Penelope is not indecisive and she does not live in the past. She is an intelligent woman (as both the episode of Laertes's shroud and the trial with Odysseus's bow demonstrate). She wants to wait to consider remarriage until she is sure that her son Telemachus can stand on his own without her support.

Fidelity to her husband, devotion to her son, care for the household, and resourcefulness on a par with Odysseus's own, especially where any of the foregoing are concerned: these are the characteristics of Homer's Penelope. She is a realist: she knows there is almost no hope that Odysseus will come back after an absence of twenty years, but she will not deny that last little bit of hope its chance, which sets her apart from the suitors and the faithless servants. Her test of Odysseus's identity by

mentioning their marriage bed proves that she is the equal of the master of schemes himself.

Philoetius

A longtime servant of Odysseus, Philoetius manages the herds for the household. He has remained loyal to his absent master, who he hopes will return, but thinks it unlikely.

Philoitios

See Philoetius

Polyphemos

See Polyphemus

Polyphemus

A son of Poseidon and a Cyclops, a one-eyed giant. He lives on an island which is usually thought to be Sicily. He is presented as a member of a lawless race that does not acknowledge the gods, but which also lives in an area that provides for all their needs without effort on their part.

Polyphemus, in Homer, is depicted as a particularly savage giant, who eats human beings raw and washes them down with either milk or wine. He briefly captures Odysseus and his men; they get him drunk and blind him, after which they escape from his cave by clinging to the bellies of his sheep and goats. The blinded giant counts his livestock by feeling their backs, but is unaware of the escaping men sneaking out under the animals. Polyphemus asks his father Poseidon for revenge

against Odysseus, which he gets.

Poseidon

Son of Cronus and Rhea, and brother of Zeus and Hades, Poseidon is the god of the sea, earthquakes, and horses. He is typically portrayed as a stately, older figure, though one capable of great passion and bluster (not unlike the storms at sea that were said to be caused by his anger).

In both the *Iliad* (where he is still furious with the Trojans because of a slight a generation in the past) and the *Odyssey* (where Odysseus languishes for years because of an injury to one of Poseidon's sons), Poseidon is stubborn and prone to holding a grudge, but not entirely unreasonable. When he is all set to bury the island of Scheria under a mountain in retribution for the assistance the Phaeacians gave to Odysseus in getting home, he gives way to Zeus's persuasion and "contents" himself with turning their ship into stone as it sails back into the Phaeacian harbor.

Teiresias

See Tiresias

Telamonian

See Ajax the Greater

Telemachos

See Telemachus

Telemachus

Son of Odysseus and Penelope, Telemachus is only a baby when Odysseus left for Troy (IV.112). He grows to manhood in a land beset by civic disorder (II.26-27) and a household that has lately become the object of a concerted effort to drive it into poverty or at the very least to reassign control to someone other than its rightful heir.

As we see him early in the poem, Telemachus is rather shy and diffident. He has no memories of his resourceful father to use as a model, and no strong male figure to look up to or to show him the ways of a ruler. Yet under Athena's guidance, Telemachus begins to grow in confidence and something approaching wisdom, until at the very end of the poem we find him all but the equal of his father, even to the point of nearly stringing Odysseus's great bow (XXI.125-30), until his father signals him not to.

As with Odysseus, the very fact that Athena acts as his champion demonstrates his worth: had he not been worth, the goddess would have had disregarded him. Nor is his new-found eloquence, poise, and grace entirely Athena's doing: she helps him to discover the qualities that have long lain dormant in him, lacking the proper atmosphere in which to grow and flourish.

Tiresias

A famous prophet from the Greek city of Thebes, the son of Everes and the nymph Chariclo. Homer's near-contemporary Hesiod tells the story of how Tiresias was changed from a man into a woman after separating a pair of snakes he found mating in the woods, and eventually was changed back into a man when he again separated the same pair of snakes. He was blinded either because he took Zeus's side in an argument and Hera wanted revenge, or-in a different tradition-because he beheld Athena in the nude.

Tiresias is already in residence in the underworld at the time of the epic. He is the only person in the underworld who has any degree of current knowledge about the world above: everyone else knows only what has happened up to the time of his death, unless news can be obtained from a new arrival. Tiresias is also a prominent character in the Theban plays of Sophocles (496-406 BC), particularly the *Antigone* (441 BC) and *Oedipus the King*.

Tritogeneia

See Athena

Zeus

Son of Cronus and Rhea, brother and husband of Hera, brother of Poseidon and Hades, Zeus is god of the sky, of the clouds, of storms and thunder, and the ruler of the other gods. Zeus in the *Odyssey* is much more in the background than was Zeus in the *Iliad*. In the present poem, Zeus is more of a cosmic enforcer of the customs, a keeper of the peace among the gods (and sometimes among mortals, as in XXIV.482-86), and a benevolent observer than the direct participant he was in Homer's previous work.

His hand seems to rest more securely on the reins of power in the *Odyssey* as well. Whereas in the *Iliad* the other gods frequently challenged his decisions and stood up to him in council until he tactfully reminded them of his superior power, in the *Odyssey*, his directives are obeyed without hesitation or threats, and no one even seems to consider opposing him.

Themes

Creativity, Imagination, and Deception

You might say that "Creativity" or "Imagination" is Odysseus's stock-in-trade. In fact, he is not mentioned by name for the first 20 lines of the poem: the first word used to describe Odysseus, at the end of the very first line of the poem, is *polutropon*, which literally means "of many twists."

We might say "shifty" these days, except that Homer does not appear to mean anything negative by the word, merely descriptive-Odysseus *is* rather a twisty-turny sort of fellow: he has to be, just in order to survive.

It should be no surprise, then, to discover that Odysseus is beloved of Athena, who is the goddess of creativity and imagination. She and Odysseus have much in common, as she remarks in Book 13 (XIII.296-99), including a joy in "weaving schemes" (XIII.386).

A large part of Odysseus's creative energy is channeled into deceiving the people around him. In fact, Athena gives Odysseus what is either a left-handed compliment or a mild reproach in Book 13 when she says:

Wily-minded wretch, never weary of tricks, you wouldn't even dream, not even in your own native land, of giving up your wily ways, or the telling of the clever tales that are dear to you from the very root of your being (XIII.293-95).

Yet it is important to remember that Odysseus only tells such "clever" (or "thieving"-the Greek word used can have both meanings) tales because he needs to: he waits until he is certain of their motives to tell the Phaeacians his true identity, but he does so when pressed. Only when he must remain anonymous to stay alive or to further some ultimate purpose does he continue a deception beyond the first moment

when it could be dropped.

Heroism

Odysseus is a legitimate hero: his reputation from the *Iliad* is enough to establish that, quite apart from the close relationship he has with Athena and, to a lesser degree, with Hermes. The gods only help those who are worthy, after all: none of the gods lifts a finger to help the suitors, for example, who get what they deserve (II.281-84, XX.394).

Yet how are we to explain the very un-heroic (if not actually anti-heroic) things Odysseus does in this poem? None of the heroes in the *Iliad*, for example, would likely have endured the kind of insults and abuses that Odysseus takes from the suitors, or even have considered concealing his identity, even to further a noble goal such as the destruction of those very suitors. Should readers therefore assume that Odysseus is not a hero after all? Or can Odysseus be seen as an entirely new kind of hero?

The heroes of the *Iliad* were locked into an almost ritual pattern of behavior that is suited to war and the battlefield. Odysseus has his place in that heroic environment as well, but in the *Odyssey*, Homer gives us a glimpse of what it means to be a hero *off* the battlefield as well as on it. Odysseus is facing circumstances that are enormously different from those he had to contend with during the war, and he responds to them in an appropriately heroic fashion. Homer is broadening the definition of what it means to be a hero.

Human Condition

"What does it mean to be human?" This may be the single most important theme in the *Odyssey*. The poem gives us every kind of example of humanity-good, bad, young, old, individuals and groups, the living and even the dead. Each is an integral part of the story of Odysseus-which is in "turn our own story, as we try to discover the answer

to that question for ourselves.

There are two incidents in the poem that highlight the importance of this theme for Homer. One is Odysseus's refusal of Calypso's offer to make him immortal (V.215-24). The other is Achilles's reply when Odysseus attempts to console him in the underworld:

"I'd rather be a field-hand, bound in service to another man, with no land of my own, and not much to live on, than to lord it over all the insubstantial dead" (XI.489-91).

To be human, Homer implies, and to be alive, is to matter, to be important. The dead in the underworld, like the gods on Olympus, may have a kind of existence, but it is ultimately one that is empty.

Love and Loyalty

Love and loyalty are two very important parts of the human condition, and also two important themes running through the *Odyssey*. The loyalty of Eumaeus, Eurycleia, and Philoetius, for example, stands in direct contrast to the behavior of Melantho, Melanthius, and the suitors, for which they are eventually punished. Helen and Menelaus are clearly in love, and there can be little doubt that Odysseus and Penelope feel much the same way, despite Odysseus's philanderings on his way home and Penelope's testing of her husband when he finally reveals his true identity.

Love in the *Odyssey* is neither a tempestuous passion (as it sometimes seems to be in the *Iliad*, at least where Helen and Paris are concerned) nor a "deathless romance" as it would become in the lays of the Middle Ages. Love in the *Odyssey* is much quieter: but, as the saying goes, "still waters run deep." Odysseus and Penelope may not have a grand passion any longer, but the love they do have is clearly one of the most important things in each of their worlds: it is what pulls Odysseus home (V.215ff., IX.29-34), and what keeps Penelope hoping for his return, and plotting to put off the

suitors as long as possible.

Order and Disorder

From the very beginning of the poem, we have indications that there is supposed to be an order to life, and that those who ignore or threaten that order will be punished for it (I.32ff.). The main component of that ordered system that we find in the *Odyssey* is *xenia*, the laws of hospitality. In a world without regular places for travelers to lodge, and where neither police nor other international law enforcement bodies are known, refusing shelter to a traveler or taking advantage of a guest under one's roof (or, as with the suitors, one's host) constitutes a serious breakdown in the moral and civic order of the world. Hence the laws of hospitality are raised to the level of a religious duty, and to violate those laws merits the ultimate punishment (XX.394).

But there are other indications of disorder in the poem as well. We are told at the beginning of Book 2, for example, that the assembly on Ithaca has not met since Odysseus left for Troy (11.25-27). This breakdown in civil order may have been a contributing factor in the ability of the suitors to flout the laws of *xenia* for almost four years: surely if there had been any kind of a regularly functioning government in Odysseus's absence, it would have put an end to their depredations, and Odysseus would not have had to slaughter more than a hundred people on his return home. The implication seems pretty clearly to be that the rules matter in the Homeric world, and that even small violations of those rules can have disastrous consequences.

Style

Since it is one of the first works in its genre to have survived, the *Odyssey* does not so much display the mechanics of epic poetry as help to define them. For at least 500 years after it was written, only minor modifications were made to the epic form as we see it in the *Odyssey*.

General Technique

In general, the *Odyssey* is more technically advanced than the *Iliad*. The flashbacks that seemed so awkward in the earlier poem are handled much more subtly, for example; the action jumps seamlessly from one place to another even in the middle of a book and is itself much more lively than the formalized battle scenes in the *Iliad*.

Meter

English meter involves patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. Greek meter, on the other hand, involves patterns of long and short syllables where, as a general rule, two short syllables equal one long syllable. Greek poetry does not rhyme, either, although it does make use of alliteration and assonance (repeated use of the same or similar consonant patterns and vowel patterns, respectively).

The *Odyssey* is written in dactylic hexameters, which is the "standard" form for epic poetry: in fact, this particular meter is sometimes referred to as "epic meter" or "epic hexameter." *Hexameter* means that there are six elements, or "feet," in each line; *dactylic* refers to the particular metrical pattern of each foot: in this case, the basic pattern is one long syllable followed by two shorts, although variations on that basic pattern are allowed. The final foot in each line, for example, is almost always a spondee (two long syllables, instead of one long and two shorts). The meter is sometimes varied to suit the action being described, using more dactyls when things

are moving quickly (horses galloping, for example), and more spondees when things are slow or sad.

Similes

The similes that were such common features of the *Iliad* are used much more sparingly in the *Odyssey*, which makes them all the more striking when they do appear. Often this seems to underscore the importance of a particular passage, as at the beginning of Book 20, where the following two similes are used of Odysseus, plotting the downfall of the scheming maids and the suitors, respectively, within 15 lines:

The heart inside him growled low with rage, as a bitch mounting over her weak, defenseless puppies growls, facing a stranger, bristling for a showdown-so he growled from his depths, hackles rising at their outrage. (XX.13-16, Fagles)

. . . But he himself kept tossing, turning, intent as a cook before some white-hot blazing fire who rolls his sizzling sausage back and forth, packed with fat and blood-keen to broil it quickly, tossing, turning It, this way, that way-so he cast about. . . (XX.24-26, Fagles)

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing, the practice of "hinting" at future developments in the plot either explicitly (in the form of prophecies, etc.) or implicitly, is fairly common in the *Odyssey*. It is seen most commonly in the form of the frequent "wishes" or prayers that the gods will punish the suitors for their insolence (which of course they do), and especially in Book 11, when Odysseus recounts his trip into the underworld to consult the shade of Tiresias.

Another example is the eventual destruction of the suitors in Books 21 and 22. Their doom is explicitly foretold by at least one prophet (Theoclymenus, at XX.350-57). It is

also hinted at by several omens and portents. For example, the suitors are killed on a feast day of Apollo: who is, among other things, the god of archery. Furthermore, when Odysseus eventually strings his bow it gives off a "sound like the voice of a swallow" (XXI.411): a bird which, as Homer's audience knew well, both migrates and always returns to its previous nest.

Symbolism

Homer makes very heavy use of symbolism throughout the *Odyssey*. For example, the olive trees under which Odysseus falls asleep in Book 5, and under which he and Athena thrash out their plan of action in Book 13, are symbolic of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, craft, weaving (hence the expression at XIII.386, "weave a scheme"), and war. Most of the names encountered in Books 6-12 are symbolic as well: "Alcinous" means "sharp-witted" or "brave-witted," while his queen, Arete, has a name that means "virtue." The Phaeacians's names are, almost without exception, connected in some way With the sea or with sailing, and the nymph Calypso's name is closely related to the Greek verb meaning "to hide" or "conceal." There has been some speculation that the name "Odysseus" may be related to another Greek verb meaning "to cause pain" (or, in the middle or passive voice, "to suffer pain ").

There are also two masterful symbolic plays on words in the Greek original which unfortunately do not reproduce well in English. The first is in Book 9 when Odysseus and his men are blinding Polyphemus. Odysseus has told the Cyclops that his name is "Nobody," *Outis* in Greek, from the words for "no" and "someone." When it follows "if," as when Polyphemus's neighbors respond to his cries, the Greek negative changes from *au* to *me*: *au tis* then becomes *me tis* which, though it still means "no one," sounds exactly like the Greek word for "scheme" or "plot," part of the epithet *palumetis*, "of many schemes," often applied to Odysseus.

The other play on words occurs whenever Penelope mentions Troy (XIX.260, 597, and XXIII.19). Since she herself says that the city's name is "unmentionable,"

whenever she has to mention it she combines its alternative name, "Ilion," with the word for "evil," making, in Greek, the word *Kakailian*, "Evil troy" or, as Fagles renders it, "Destroy. "

Historical Context

The context in which the Homeric poems were created is clouded by the fact that their creation is a process that spans several centuries. In a very real sense, the poems' historical and cultural background is rather like one of the archaeological sites from which we gather our information about the period. It is deep, it has many levels or layers, and over time things can get pushed up or down from their proper context. Consider, for example, that the cremation burial of Elpenor described in XII.11-15 would have been common practice in Homer's day, but extremely rare in the Bronze Age when the events he describes would have taken place.

The Bronze Age

The Trojan War and its aftermath took place in the late Bronze Age, which began around 1550 BC, the date of the very wealthy burials found by Heinrich Schliemann in Grave Circle A at Mycenae in 1873. For this reason, the period is sometimes also called the Mycenaean era. This was a time of relative stability though not, of course, without its conflicts, wars, and raids. The dominant powers in the eastern Mediterranean were the Hittites in the central part of what is now Turkey, the Egyptians in what we now call the Middle East, and, apparently, the Mycenaean kings in Greece and the surrounding islands.

These three "great kings" all ruled over literate (at least to the extent of being able to keep records and official documents, even if they left us no "literature" to speak of), apparently complex, societies (complete with bureaucrats, if the Linear B tablets found at Pylos and elsewhere are any indication). They engaged in diplomacy with each other and with numerous smaller kingdoms on the edges of their territory that served as buffer zones between them and could be compelled to provide both military and economic support under the terms of the treaties that bound them to the particular kingdom with which they were allied. These secondary kingdoms were also prime targets for raids by other "great kings" and foreign invaders, especially those that were

relatively distant from their protectors' centers of authority and military strong points.

Trade was flourishing, and, given the uncertainties of shipping and other means of transportation, together with a relatively low level of technological advancement (at least when considered by modern standards), quite surprisingly so. Distinctive Mycenaean pottery, whether as art pieces intended for display and ceremonial use, or purely for transporting trade goods like oil, grain, or perfume, is found all over the Mediterranean basin in staggering quantities throughout this period.

The Trojan War, if it took place at all, came very near the end of this flourishing civilization. The Greeks, using generational calculations, set the date of the war at around 1184 BC; modern scholarship, based on archaeological evidence at Troy and other sites, puts it some 75 years earlier, around 1250 BC. But the traditional victors at Troy did not have very long to enjoy their victory.

The Dark Age

For reasons we do not really yet understand, this civilization begins to die out around 1220 BC with the mysterious destruction and subsequent abandonment of Pylos. That event ushers in a period of decline that lasts until roughly 1050 BC, when the Mycenaean civilization literally fades away into nothingness. Some echoes of this troubled period seem to be preserved in the *Odyssey* where, for example, the first question asked of a stranger is almost always along the lines of "Are you a pirate?" The social unrest, migrations of peoples, and foreign invasions that seem to have characterized the end of the Mycenaean civilization may also have served as a model for the troubled homecomings of some of the Homeric heroes that are recounted in the poem.

Whatever its causes, the disappearance of the Mycenaean civilization marked the start of about 250 years of very difficult times in Greece: aptly referred to as the Dark Age. This period has its end with the traditional date of the first Olympiad in 776 BC, very

close to the time when we think Homer lived. Of this Dark Age we know almost nothing except what we can deduce from the period immediately following and the scanty evidence in the archaeological record.

Writing was lost, and with it, most trade seems to have disappeared except on a purely local or regional basis at best. Archaeologists working in this period report finding very little in the way of "luxury" goods like fancy pottery-when they can find anything at all. Biers (1980) suggests that there may have been as much as a 75% decrease in population from Bronze Age levels.

The Iron Age

Beginning around the 11th century BC, the Greeks began to use iron in place of bronze, to cremate their dead as opposed to burying them intact, and to establish colonies along the west coast of what is now Turkey. By Homer's day, roughly the middle of the eighth century BC, these trends were well-established and things were beginning to look up again.

Writing was just beginning to be rediscovered using a new alphabet borrowed from the Phoenicians, and foreign trade was improving, helped in no small part by the colonies along the Ionian coast which, while typically independent of their mother cities, nevertheless tended to remain on friendly terms with them. The population was again on the rise, which spurred another wave of colonization, this time chiefly toward the west (Sicily, parts of Italy, and the south of France).

At least on the Greek mainland, the era of kings was rapidly drawing to a close. By the beginning of the eighth century, the nobles had taken the reins of power from the kings almost everywhere and were ruling over family groups or tribes in what would come to be called the *polis*, or city-state.

Largely because of the decorations found on pottery from the period, this era has come

to be known as the Geometric period, but Increasing regularity was a feature of more than just the decorative arts. It was In this period that the beginnings of a Greek national identity come to the fore (prompting and/or prompted by the founding of the Olympic games and the dissemination of Homer's works, among other things). There is also evidence that more coordinated military tactics were beginning to be used.

Religious practices, if not beliefs, also seem to have begun a process of standardization at this juncture. While the Homeric heroes sometimes go to specific places for religious observances (e.g., the "shady groves" sacred to Apollo mentioned in Book 20), the majority seem to be family- or group centered rituals that take place wherever the family or group may happen to be at the moment of the ritual, and archaeological evidence from the Bronze Age tends to confirm this view. Formal altars, like the one at the fountain described in Book 17, are known from the Bronze Age, but temples, buildings specifically set aside for formal public worship, have not been identified in the archaeological record much before the ninth century BC, and become much more frequent thereafter.

After Homer's day, while the population, wealth, commerce, and industry of Greece were generally on the rise, the political pendulum swung back and forth from more aristocratic and democratic models to varying forms of one-man rule until just before the dawn of the Golden Age in the fifth century BC.

Critical Overview

The critical reputation of the *Odyssey* is perhaps best demonstrated by noting that it is generally regarded as one of the first works of true "literature" in Western culture. Tills is significant not only because the poem stands near the head of the list, as it were, but also because it had to beat out a fair amount of competition to achieve that status.

By the middle of the sixth century BC, around the same time as the Peisistratids in Athens ordered the first "standard edition" of Homer's works to be made, there were at least six other epic poems treating various parts of the Trojan War story. Most of these were fairly short, but the *Cypria*, which covered everything from the decision of the gods to cause the war through Agamemnon's quarrel with Achilles that begins Homer's work, was at least half as long as the *Iliad*. Unlike the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, however, none of the other poems in this "epic cycle" has survived except in fragmentary quotations in the works of later authors. They simply could not measure up to Homer's standard.

Certainly by the beginning of the sixth century, and possibly late in the seventh, there was already a group of poet/performers calling themselves the *Homeridae* ("Sons of Homer"). This group may have been the forerunner of the *rhapsodes*, trained singers who, while they did apparently compose and improvise works of their own, were best known for performing Homer's poetry. At least on Plato's authority, the rhapsodes seem to have begun taking liberties with the poems (see *Ion* 530d), which may have led the Peisistratids to have the "official" text written down for the judges at the Great Panathenaia (a religious festival in honor of Athena held every four years), which included a contest for the rhapsodes which required them, presumably in shifts and over several days, to recite the whole of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

For most people, those public performances were probably their major form of exposure to Homer's work. For the educated class, however, knowing one's Homer

quickly became the sign of culture and refinement. Homer is mentioned by name at least 600 times in surviving Greek literature, in texts that range from history to philosophy, religion, and even legal speeches. Aristotle holds him up not only as the "supreme poet in the serious style" (*Poetics* 1448b20), but also as the forerunner of both tragedy and comedy. Herodotus (*Histories* 11.53) even credits Homer, along with his near-contemporary Hesiod, with being the one who gave Greek religion its standard forms: the names, spheres and functions, descriptions, and descent of the gods.

The one dissenting voice in the ancient world seems to have been that of Plato. Although he quotes Homer on more than one occasion, and even lampoons the rhapsodes and their "beautification" or embellishment of the standard text in his dialogue *Ion*, in the *Republic*, his lengthy discussion of the ideal state and the education of its leaders, Plato dismisses Homer as a mere "imitator" and excludes him (and poets generally) from his educational program (which was never implemented).

Homer was frequently imitated in the classical world, whether by the authors of the other poems in the epic cycle, or lampooned as he was by Aristophanes in several of his plays (especially the *Birds* and the *Clouds*), yet his work was never equaled. Roman literature in particular owes a great deal to Homer, and to the *Odyssey* in particular: later authors dated the beginnings of their national literature to a translation of the *Odyssey* into Latin made by the slave Livius Andronicus around 220 BC, and the great Roman national epic the *Aeneid* not only uses Homer's epic hexameter line, it consciously imitates themes and events from both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Interest in Homer continued well into the Christian era, as evidenced by Macrobius's *Saturnalia* (dated to the early part of the fifth century AD), where educated Romans still know their Greek, and spend an evening discussing the relative merits of Homer's treatment of the Troy story in comparison with that of Virgil. With the fall of Rome in AD 455, however, Homer and his works fell into disrepute for roughly a thousand years, until the scholars of the Renaissance "rediscovered" classical antiquity and learned to read Greek again.

During that time, the story of Odysseus received somewhat less attention than did the story of the Trojan War, but never entirely died out. With the Renaissance came a revival of interest in Homer and his texts, which were first published in the modern era in Florence in 1488. The French moralist Francois de Fenelon (1651-1715) turned the story of Telemachus into a Christian fable with his 1699 publication of *Les Aventures de Telemaque* (incidentally one of Heinrich Schliemann's favorite books), and the Spanish poet Pedro Calderon (1600-1681) did the same with the story of Odysseus and Circe.

Interest in Homer and his works was revived in the eighteenth century when F. A. Wolf first proposed the "Homeric Question" (succinctly stated: "Who wrote what, and when?"). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) started, but did not finish, a romantic tragedy about Odysseus and Nausicaa. It is thought that Milton was significantly influenced by Homer in composing *Paradise Lost*, and he certainly provided inspiration for later poets such as Tennyson and Byron, though their works are narrower in scope and execution than Homer's. As the recent mass-market printing of E. V. Rieu's translation suggests, the *Odyssey* continues to enjoy the critical acclaim and popular interest that have been associated with it throughout most of the two and a half millennia since it was first composed.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Spires focuses on the human element and scale of the Odyssey as an important reason for its continued popularity.

As Peter Jones remarks in his 1991 introduction to E. V. Rieu's translation of the poem, "The *Odyssey*-the return of Odysseus from Troy to reclaim his threatened home on Ithaca-is a superb *story*, rich in character, adventure and incident. . . and making the household, rather than the battlefield, the centre of its world" (p. xi). That, I think, goes a long way toward explaining its perennial appeal, even some 3,000 years after it was written.

That is not to say that the *Iliad*, Homer's other epic poem, is not also a superb story: just a different kind of story. If Homer's works were operas, the *Iliad* would be something out of Wagner: rather heavy, highly formalized, and full of deep meaning-along with some really great singing and special effects. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, would be something like Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*: it has a definite moral message, but that message is conveyed through humorous means, on a human scale, with plenty of mistaken identities and other plot twists-and again, some really great singing and special effects. Or, to put it in somewhat more modern terms, the *Iliad* is more like Cecil B. DeMille's treatment of *The Ten Commandments*, while the *Odyssey* has a bit more in common with George Lucas's *Star Wars* films.

Jones also suggests (p. xxxii) that Homer has adapted Odysseus's adventures in Books 9-12 from the myths surrounding Jason and the voyage of the Argo (which were themselves made into a short epic poem by Apollonius of Rhodes in the third century BC). While there are certainly characters in Homer that also appear in those myths (chiefly the parents of the Homeric heroes, but Circe is also the sister of the king who proves so troublesome to Jason and his companions), and certain of the episodes do bear a resemblance to those attributed to the company of the Argo, it seems to me that "adapted" is perhaps too strong a word: and it must be emphasized that Homer would

have had excellent reasons for including such material in the first place, if that is what he did.

To begin with, heroism is usually set against the background of a great war or major battle. Having already used that setting in the *Iliad*, Homer must now turn to the other traditional setting for heroes and heroism, the long and difficult journey: there was simply no other "vocabulary" for heroic behavior available for him to use.

Related to that problem is one of what we might call "credentials." Tradition had it that Odysseus's father was one of those who sailed with Jason on the Argo: enough to establish Odysseus as a potential hero, but not to prove him a hero in his own right. (The Same sort of thing happens to Telemachus in the *Odyssey*: merely being the son of ill's father is enough to put him in line to inherit Odysseus's estates and authority, but if he is going to hold on to that inheritance, he must earn the respect of others and demonstrate his ability and fitness to succeed his illustrious father.)

Given that Odysseus was much more skilled at stratagems, ambushes, and tactics than at simple hack-and-bash fighting (at least given the way Homer depicted him in the *Iliad*), the best way to establish Odysseus's "credentials" as a hero would be for him to do the same sorts of things his father Laertes had done in his younger days, as those are the sorts of things that heroes *do* when they are not "lucky" enough to have a war in which to prove their merits.

Unlike the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* is concerned more with the individual than the group, and with individuals who are much more down-to-earth than those we find in the earlier poem. Most of us will never be a Hector, keeping an invading force at bay all by ourselves, or an Achilles, single-handedly responsible for the continued success of our comrades-in-arms. But we might measure up to a Penelope, a Telemachus, or even an Odysseus, at least in spirit and understanding: there may not have been enchantresses, magic potions, and interfering gods to contend with, but at least until the middle of the 20th century there were still new places and new peoples to discover and to explore, much as Odysseus did on his wanderings. Our eyes are now beginning

to turn outward into the reaches of space, but the spirit of Odysseus is no less comfortable there than it was here on earth: it can scarcely have been by accident that the command module of the ill-fated Apollo XIII mission was christened the *Odyssey*.

As Jasper Griffin points out in his discussion of the "after-life" of the *Odyssey* (1987, p. 99), the popularity of the Homeric poems is something of an anomaly: most epic works are popular for a time, then fade away into obscurity, only to be read by scholars and specialists. One of the things that makes the *Odyssey* so enjoyable to read is that it is full of people that we can relate to, unlike so many of the traditional stories handed down over the centuries. There is a little bit of Odysseus, of Penelope, of Telemachus, of Eumaeus (and, to be honest, probably some of the suitors as well) in each of us. These are people we can relate to: people we might conceivably meet in real life, on the street, in our homes, at school, where we work, etc.

H. D. F. Kitto is right to say (p. 288) that Longinus's criticism of the *Odyssey* tells us more about Longinus than it does about either Homer or his work. Longinus was looking for things in the

Odyssey that simply were not there: and for very good reasons. While it has obvious connections with the *Iliad*, and was almost certainly written or composed after that poem, it is important to look at the *Odyssey* as a work in its own right. It is incorrect to call it an "epilogue" to the *Iliad*, as if it were merely an afterthought, something to tie up a few of the loose ends Homer leaves hanging at the end of the earlier tale.

It is also important to look at the *Odyssey* as a work of its time. There is much in the poem that we can relate to, but at least a few things that do not sit well with most modern readers. Slavery, for example, is something that everyone in the poem (and in Homer's own time) took for granted. Although it may disgust us, it should be noted that the slaves in the *Odyssey*, especially Eumaeus and Eurycleia, are well-fed, prosperous (Eumaeus even has a slave of his own: see XIV.449- 453), and treated more like a member of the household itself than a servant in it. Laertes is said to have honored Eurycleia no less than his own wife (1.432-33), and Anticleia raises Eumaeus

with her own daughter and, when the daughter is married off, she gives him gifts and sends him to a country estate (XV.361-70).

There is also the question of the suitors' destruction. The wholesale slaughter of 108 men simply because they thought to pay court to an available woman, even given that they were rude and disrespectful, seems a bit much to our modern sensibilities. No one in Homer's audience would have given this a second thought: something that could also be said, at least in parts of the world, even well into the modern era. As Homer is careful to point out from the very beginning of the poem, the suitors bring their destruction down on themselves and could easily have avoided it if they had paid attention to the warnings they were given (e.g., II.160-70, XX.350-57).

To understand that attitude, it is important to remember, first of all, that the obligations of a host to a guest and vice-versa were considered sacred duties, enforced by Zeus in his aspect as god of strangers. Ancient mythology is full of allusions to the fate of those who maltreat their guests, from the story of Baucis and Philemon in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* right back to the destruction of the Cities of the Plain in the Hebrew Scriptures. Secondly, in Homer's Greece, the ability of a family or a household to survive is directly linked to its being able to feed itself. By consuming the resources of the household, the suitors are threatening nothing less than the survival of Odysseus's family. On top of that disruption of the social order, the suitors are also plotting to kill both Telemachus (IV .843) and Odysseus, if they can manage it (II.244-51). Where we have police forces and law courts, in Homer's day personal vengeance and family retribution were the only means for redressing wrongs. Eventually the Greeks would come to see that this system had its own problems, and to lay the groundwork for our modern legal system, but that day was several centuries after Homer's time.

Any suggestion that the *Odyssey* is the production of a mind in decline is not worthy of serious consideration. *Just* consider the intricacy of the plot, the masterful choice of both setting and the point of dramatic "time" at which Homer begins the story, the way he manipulates his chronology so the major characters can tell *their* stories of what has

taken place during the 20 years of Odysseus's absence without being dull or anti-climactic, the extensive use of foreshadowing and symbolism, etc. It was quite likely for reasons of this kind that Aristotle described Homer as the "supreme poet in the serious style" (*Poetics* I448b20).

Aristotle also ascribed to Homer the origins of Athenian tragedy and comedy, and it is probable that he had the *Odyssey* specifically in mind when he made that claim. There is little question that both Achilles and Hector are quasi-tragic figures in the *Iliad*, but it is in the *Odyssey* that the norms of tragedy as Aristotle would later describe them in his *Poetics* can best be seen. We have the noble man, temporarily brought low by misfortune and, at least to some degree, by his own character, together with some rather ignoble types who enjoy early prosperity but eventually reap their just rewards. There is even a double change of circumstances: from good to bad for the suitors, from bad to good for Odysseus. Justice and order prevail in the end, Odysseus is safely restored to home, kingdom, and family-and along the way we are treated to some fantastic stories and comic episodes that Aristophanes in all his glory would have been happy to use.

Peter Levi accurately sums up the *Odyssey's* merits and attractions when he says:

What is refreshing in the *Odyssey* is its expression of simple and vigorous human appetites. What is more deeply satisfying is it is deeply entangled in the miseries and dangers of the long story, the sadness of Odysseus and the terrible momentum of his homecoming, lit, as it were, by the lightning-strokes of Zeus. One would be justified, perhaps, in reading this long poem only for its surface brilliance and variety

But at a deeper level the satisfaction of the *Odyssey* is hard to disentangle from the recurring motifs and images that are mirrors of its meaning. Men are foolish, strangers are dangerous, the anger of the sea is obscure and implacable, Zeus is hard (*Pelican History of Greek Literature*, 1985, p. 42).

Source: Michael J. Spires, for *Epics for Students*, Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Jones offers a general overview of the Odyssey, encouraging the modern reader to explore this work in order to discover its "enduring hold on our imagination. "

The *Odyssey* is the second work of Western literature (the *Iliad* is the first). The ancient world agreed almost unanimously that both epics were the work of Homer. The *Odyssey*-the return of Odysseus from Troy to reclaim his threatened home on Ithaca-is a superb *story*, rich in character, adventure and incident, reconciling reality with fantasy, the heroic with the humble, the intimate with the divine, and making the household, rather than the battlefield, the centre of its world. . . .

What stands out. . . is the brilliant ingenuity with which Homer has engineered situations in which accounts of Odysseus' adventures and of developments on Ithaca in his absence can be plausibly given-not merely the great flashback of [Books] 9-12, but a host of smaller, highly significant, moments. And the more one thinks about it, the more difficult it becomes to envisage an *Odyssey* which *did* follow a purely temporal sequence. . . . Consider an *Odyssey* which started in [Book] 1 with Odysseus leaving Troy. First, the adventures which the poet has put into Odysseus' mouth as a flashback in [Books] 9-12 would have to be narrated as a third-person narrative. ('First Odysseus went to X and then he went to Y', etc.) Consequently they would lose much of their excitement as a personal reminiscence, and of their significance as an extended exercise in heroic self-revelation. Second, once the hero had returned, it would be impossible to give the intensive treatment to Penelope, Telemachus, the suitors and the effect of Odysseus' prolonged absence on the household that the poet achieves in his chosen version. One would not know what the hero was returning *to*, and why his return was so urgently needed. We would lose the rich and subtle characterization of, and interaction between, the people III Ithaca to which he returns. . . .

Seen in this light, Homer's decision to target the epic on the moment of Odysseus' return is a master-stroke. Far from losing perspective on the previous twenty years, the reader is endowed with a far sharper and more telling focus on It, because the events of the intervening years are selected by, and told through the mouths of, the characters themselves. What those twenty years *mean to them* is of far greater significance to the plot than simply 'what happened during Odysseus' absence'.

This rich interaction of past and present is one of the great glories of the *Odyssey*, and is an important component of the narrative's power and pathos. . . . The past [gives] the key to the present, as it does so often in the *Odyssey*. In an epic of return and recognition, how could it not? When Argus recognizes Odysseus, we go back to Odysseus' hunting days (17.291-317); when Eurycleia does, we go back to his naming ceremony (19.392-466); when Laertes does, we go back to the young Odysseus in his father's garden (24.336-44). . . .

There was no law that forced the poet to stick to material within the traditional story. It is, for example, clear that the poet has introduced all sorts of non-Odyssean material into the *Odyssey*. The Ares-Aphrodite story. . . is obviously one. Calypso is probably an invention to allow time for Telemachus to grow up. . . . Sometimes the joins in such material show. For example, the tales which Odysseus tells in [Books] 9-12 were almost certainly adapted from the Jason/Argonaut saga (Circe, the Wandering Rocks, the Sirens and Scylla and Charybdis were all probably Argonautic adventures before they became Odyssean ones too; cf. 12.70). The result is that in an epic where Poseidon is the main antagonist, Odysseus' men are finally destroyed by the sun-god. Again, consider the effect of the bow contest upon the narrative. Athene is Odysseus' great patron, but the bow is Apollo's instrument: consequently, it is not until Odysseus has used up the arrows (22.116-25) that Athene enters the fray (22.205-6). . . .

In the *Iliad*, divine intervention is commonplace. Gods appear either as themselves or in disguise (usually the former) and are ever-present, helping their favourites and hindering their enemies. In the *Odyssey*, their presence is far less noticeable, and with the possible exception of 15.19, they appear only in disguise. Zeus himself remains on

the whole apart from the action, and when he does intervene, he is a quite unIliadic god of human justice. Observe how Homer sets out the ethical programme of the *Odyssey* in the opening book: Odysseus' men brought their own death upon themselves by eating the cattle of the sun-god (1.79), and Aegisthus did likewise by ignoring divine warnings, killing Agamemnon and marrying Clytaemnestra (1.32-43). In other words, the gods are concerned about the justice of human behaviour in a way in which they are not in the *Iliad*. What, therefore, will be the consequences for the suitors of *their* behaviour in Odysseus' household? The moral lesson is firmly drawn at their slaughter (22.354-23.63-7).

But there is one god with a high profile in the *Odyssey*-*Odysseus'* patron, Athene. She stands by her favourite and guides his steps almost continually, and the teasing encounter they enjoy at 13.221 ff. is unique in Homer for the closeness of the relationship it depicts between god and mortal. It is tempting to say that Athene's continuing presence diminishes the stature of Odysseus. But it is important to emphasize that in Homer the gods help only those who are worthy of it. Athene's patronage does not diminish but enhances Odysseus' status as a hero. Her willingness to help his son Telemachus is a similar index of *his* value. . . .

This hero [Odysseus] needs more than martial skills if he is to survive, return home and restore his house to what it used to be. His cunning is evinced in many different episodes. . . . Restraint and endurance, deception and disguise: these Odyssean characteristics are shared, of course, by Athene, and willingly embraced by Telemachus when he is reunited with his father in [Book] 16. In the prevailing atmosphere of ignorance of the true nature of things in which characters wallow from the very beginning of the *Odyssey*. . . such characteristics help to generate a text dominated by irony, pathos, despair and joyously happy surprise (especially in the recognition scenes).

Odysseus, down the ages, has been a man of many parts. But the text of our *Odyssey* invites us to admire its multifariousness: it is the secret of its enduring hold on our imagination. Howard Clarke summarizes those qualities which make our *Odyssey*

what it is:

The *Odyssey* is broad and inclusive: it is an *epic* poem, not in the *Iliad's* way, with men and nations massed in the first conflict of East and West, but epic in its comprehension of all conditions of men-good and bad, young and old, dead and alive-and all qualities of life-subhuman, human and superhuman, perilous and prosperous, familiar and fabulous The Greek critic Longinus described It as an 'ethical' poem, a word that Cicero later explained (*Orator* 37, 128) by a definition that could well be applied to the *Odyssey*' adapted to men's natures, their habits and every fashion of their life'.

Source: Peter V Jones, "Introduction," in *The Odyssey*, by Homer, translated by E V Rieu, Penguin Classics, 1991, pp. xi-lii.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Griffin offers a wide-ranging appraisal of the structure and themes of the Odyssey.

The conception of starting the poem with Odysseus offstage for the first four books was a bold one. Not only did it involve technical difficulties in handling and uniting two strands of narrative, it also risked the first appearance of the hero being an anticlimax. In the first four books Odysseus is constantly mentioned: he is in everyone's thoughts. On Ithaca life has been in a kind of limbo for twenty years, with no public assemblies since Odysseus left. Old Nestor, a well-informed man, thinks constantly of Odysseus but has not set eyes on him for ten years. A long journey brings us to Sparta, where Menelaus tells us that long ago and far away he was told by a god that Odysseus was held on an island by a nymph, without a ship. From that tremendous climax of remoteness the hero must somehow return.

The decision that the *Odyssey* should be set ten years after the fall of Troy—the figure strongly recalling the ten years of war at Troy which have elapsed before the *Iliad*—meant that most of Odysseus' adventures would have to be told retrospectively. It would be highly anti-climactic to narrate all that after the killing of the Suitors and the dissipating of tension, so a place needed to be found where the stories could be unpacked at leisure. . .

The Phaeacians provide the setting for the tales. They are men, but remote from ordinary humanity and close to the gods: they serve as a transition between the fantasy world of the tales and the human world of Ithaca. The poet is explicit about their early history and also about the reason why there are no marvellous Phaeacian ships to bring home shipwrecked mariners nowadays: that may suggest that they are largely the poet's own creation. . . .

The adventures are in themselves timeless and placeless, belonging to Sinbad the Sailor as much as to Odysseus. Somehow they have become attached to the name of one of the heroes who fought at Troy, in a definite historical context. An effort has been made to arrange them in a coherent and morally intelligible order, especially in terms of obedience to the gods and resolute endurance. Apart from their intrinsic interest, they are needed in order to keep the Odysseus of Books Thirteen to Twenty One, who does very little that is heroic, accepts humiliations, and at moments looks like a real beggar than a hero, in our minds as a man of truly great deeds. . . .

The whole poem is pervaded and held together by a very explicit theory of justice and of divine behaviour. . . Zeus is ultimately responsible for the protection of the helpless, beggars and suppliants and good kings in distress. All that happens in the *Odyssey* is, as far as possible, made to illustrate that conception. Sinners are, in the end, punished; the final triumph of Odysseus is a triumph for goodness over evil. . . .

All serious poetry of early Greece involves the gods. The presence of the divine agents, visibly at work in what happens, enables the poet to show the meaning of events and the nature of the world. . . . But the divine cast-list [in the *Odyssey*] is considerably less extensive, with a number of the great gods of the *Iliad* barely appearing, such as Hera, Apollo, Artemis, and Hephaestus, and no more lively scenes of divine dissension. Poseidon does not want Odysseus to get home, and so the subject is simply not raised among the gods until a day comes when he is away (Book One); and when Odysseus says to Athena that he was not aware of any help from her on his perilous journey, she replies that she did not want to fight with Poseidon her uncle. . . .

Fewer gods, then, appear, and they do not behave in the old turbulent manner. The frivolity of the gods, indeed, is now concentrated in the story which Demodocus sings to the Phaeacians: . . . again with Ares and Aphrodite in an undignified role [The] tale is a variation on the central theme of the *Odyssey*, a wife's chastity menaced in the absence of her husband. On earth that ends in tragedy, whether she yields like the guilty wife of Agamemnon or resists like the virtuous Penelope; in heaven there is temporary embarrassment, laughter, and the adulterous pair go off to their separate

cult centres and resume their existence of splendour. ... But the gods draw the same moral from this story as men draw from the destruction of the Suitors: "III deeds come to no good" (8.329). . . .

The *Odyssey* is . . . a poem of wide interests and sympathies. Animals, servants, exotic foreigners, craftsmen, beggars, women: all are objects of its curiosity. It is no good to be a modest vagrant (17.577); it is better to beg in the town than in the country (17.18); outdoor servants like to talk face to face with the mistress and hear her news, and have a meal, and go off with a present (15.376-8). Such humble truths interest the poet of the *Odyssey*. . . .

In the *Odyssey* the individual stands against the group, Odysseus against his insubordinate sailors, Telemachus and Penelope and Odysseus in turn against the Suitors. When Odysseus is alone among the Phaeacians we see the same pattern, though with less hostility: the isolated individual with no resource but his wits, confronting a self-confident and homogeneous mass. It is not an accident that the Suitors remain so little individualised.

Not only is it now one against many: in this world the hero must contend not only with his equals but also with turbulent inferiors. Odysseus' sailors are mutinous, and they find a ring-leader in Odysseus' kinsman Eurylochus (10.429ff., 12.278ff), apart from their disastrous action, caused by jealousy, of opening the bag of the winds (10.34-55)[In his false tales,] Odysseus may claim to be the illegitimate son of a wealthy man, excluded from inheriting by his legitimate brothers at the old man's death (14.199-215), or even a man who was in bad odour with a great chief because he insisted on leading his own contingent rather than subordinating himself, who was consequently treated unfairly in the division of booty, and who avenged himself by killing the chief's son. . . .(13.256-68). These stories of Odysseus are close to real life and the events of the stormy archaic period; there is little high-flown heroism about them. . . .

In such a world loyalty is a treasured quality. Some of Odysseus' servants are faithful, and they are rewarded. Others are disloyal. The maidservants are hanged, Melanthius the goatherd comes to a sticky end. The fidelity of Odysseus' wife is crucial to the story, and the contrast between her and the disloyal wife of Agamemnon is repeatedly emphasised. . . .

The plot of the *Odyssey* [creates] a tension between two types of heroism: the dashing Diadic fighter like Achilles, pitted against other heroes in equal battle, and the wily opponent of giants and witches, who must use guile against overwhelming force and impossible odds. Achilles chooses a glorious death at Troy rather than long life Without fame, but Odysseus will die in his bed, a very gentle death in sleek old age. To reach that goal he must show himself a survivor, prepared to beg, to use guile, to accept humiliations, to conceal his feelings. ..

In all these ways, the attitude to property, to food, to telling the truth, Odysseus stands closer to the common attitudes of men. He is brave and he has fought well in battle, but he is more at home in night expeditions, ambushes, stratagems. He finds himself in situations in which Achilles cannot be imagined: you simply cannot be Achilles in the cave of a Cyclops. The heroism of Achilles represents the highest flight of the heroic which early Greece could imagine, living for glory and accepting death. Odysseus is not just less heroic than that; he also has human attachments of a sort which Achilles does not. . . .

Odysseus is forced to learn the power of self-control, to keep silent and not go in for easy heroism. He fails once, early in his adventures, at the end of the ordeal with the Cyclops. Having kept his nerve and his self-possession, remembered to give a false name instead of his real one, remembered that it will not do to attack the sleeping monster and kill him with his sword-that would be heroic, but they would all be doomed without the power to roll away the mighty stone-and having kept his men up to the mark in the act of blinding the monster, he yields to a temptation of heroism in revealing his own name as a shout of triumph. That was a disastrous mistake, and we do not see him repeat It. In his own house he endures in silence, accepts insults

without immediate response, and bides his time, even watching Penelope weep while appearing unmoved (19.209ff). . . .

The power to conceal one's feelings is important in a world full of treachery and hostility. But for those who, in such a world, show themselves worthy to be trusted, the response is warmly emotional. . . . At last the ice can melt, as it does again in the meeting and embrace between husband and wife in [Book 23]. Fidelity is rewarded, and the guard finally can be lowered. Still there lie perils ahead, but the ultimate outcome will be happy, with gods benevolent and love restored in the family and prosperity among their people. . . . From the narration of suffering we are to draw serenity: the gods devise disasters, Odysseus is told, that there may be song among men (8.579), and to listen to that sad song gives delight. Listen and learn, Penelope was told: the gods bring unhappiness on many others besides you (1.353-5). In the end Odysseus and Penelope have learned that hard lesson. Life is full of unhappiness, but that is what is transmuted into song. They achieve harmony with that process and learn, as we are to learn, the lesson of the *Odyssey*.

Source: Jasper Griffin, in *Homer: The Odyssey*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp 47-98

Media Adaptations

There have been several film and television productions based wholly or in part on the *Odyssey*, beginning in 1954 with the Dino De Laurentiis production of *Ulisse* (released in English as *Ulysses* in the same year), directed by Mario Camerini and starring Kirk Douglas as Ulysses and Anthony Quinn as Antinoos in 1963, Pietro Francisci directed the film *Ercole sfida Sansone*, released in 1965 in the United States as *Hercules, Samson, and Ulysses* 1967 British production of *Ulysses*, based on the 1922 James Joyce novel which was itself based in part on the *Odyssey*, starred Martin Dempsey and Barbara Jefford Radio televisione Italiana (RTI) produced a television version of the poem in 1969, directed by Mario Bara and Franco Rossi NBC television produced a two-part miniseries of the epic in May of 1997, starring Armand Assante, Isabella Rossellini, Vanessa Williams, and Irene Pappas.

The British rock band Cream, made up of Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce, and Ginger Baker, recorded the song "Tales of Brave Ulysses" on their second album, *Disraeli Gears*, in 1967 The song includes characters, themes, and motifs from the epic.

There is at least a symbolic link between Homer's poem and the classic 1968 MGM production *2001: A Space Odyssey*, directed by Stanley Kubrick and starring Keir Dullea, beginning with the title of the movie Kubrick's film, although based on a 1950 novel by Arthur C. Clarke, does seem to ask at least some of the same questions about human nature and its meaning as Homer does in the *Odyssey*.

Elements from the *Odyssey* have received at least two (widely separated) operatic treatments. The first was in 1641 when Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) composed *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* ("The Return of Ulysses"), treating Odysseus's return to Ithaca after his wanderings. The second is Richard Strauss's (1864-1949) *Die ägyptische Helena* in 1928, with a libretto by the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal based on the account of Helen's visit to Egypt in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*.

Princeton University is host to a World Wide Web site entitled "The Odysseus Page" ([http:// www.princeton.edu/~cdmoen/](http://www.princeton.edu/~cdmoen/)) The site discusses the various encounters Odysseus experiences in his wanderings, and includes quotes from the *Odyssey*, links to Images of some of the places and things mentioned in the poem, and some brief commentary. The Perseus Project at Tufts University (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>), which is also available on CD-ROM for Mac from Yale University Press with a Windows version in the works, offers both the original Greek text and the Loeb Classical Library translation in English (which is, unfortunately, written in a highly artificial style and not recommended for use except as a reference), together with background information on many of the characters and places in the poem Alan Liu's "Voice of the Shuttle" classical studies page (<http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/shuttle/classics.html>) is a good place to start looking for information and links to other sites relevant to the classics and classical literature.

Audio cassette versions of the *Odyssey* are available from Dove Audio (1996), Penguin Highbridge Audio (two versions, both dated 1996: the Fagles translation, narrated by Sir Ian McKellen, and Allen Mandelbaum's translation), and Harper Audio (1996, the Lattimore translation, narrated by Anthony Quayle).

Topics for Further Study

. In the "lying speech" to his wife in Book 19, Odysseus says to Penelope (speaking of himself in the third person): "Odysseus would have been home long ago, but he felt in his spirit that it would be better to go all about the world collecting possessions."

Consider carefully Odysseus's character, as portrayed by Homer in the poem so far.

Do you think he was motivated only by greed? Why or why not? The Greek word *chremata*, which can be translated as "possessions," can mean money or other valuables: but its literal meaning is "things that are useful or needful." What sorts of "useful" or "needful" things does Odysseus collect on his wanderings?

. What are the values of a hero (for example, Achilles, Hector, or any of the other major characters in the *Iliad*)? How do they compare with the values of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*? What sorts of differences do you find, and which set of values do you think are more likely to produce a harmonious, ordered society? Why? How do those values compare to the ones that prevail in our day and age?

. How are the gods portrayed in the *Odyssey*? What differences (or similarities) do you find between this depiction and the one found in the *Iliad*?

. Read Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poems *The LotosEaters* and *Ulysses*. Do you think the sentiments expressed in the latter poem were intended as an answer to those expressed in the former? Why or why not? Does the portrait Tennyson has painted of Odysseus match Homer's? In what way(s)?

Compare & Contrast

. Late Bronze Age (the time of the *Odyssey*): Government consists of a few "great kings" (those of Egypt, the Hittite empire, and, the kings of Mycenae, among others) who control very large areas of territory, either directly or by alliance in loose confederations, at least some of which were explicitly spelled out in treaties. Raids and looting are fairly common, especially at the edges of these kingdoms, far away from the central authority.

Iron Age: Monarchy is still practiced in places, but it has been widely replaced by aristocratic or oligarchic societies based on family or clan groupings. The development of what would eventually be called the *polis*, or city-state, is well under way. Inter- "national" cooperation is beginning to be re-established after the isolation of the Dark Age.

Late twentieth century: Many different types of government are practiced, though various kinds of democracy are more common than monarchy these days. There are still, however, a relatively small number of "superpower" or highly influential nations. Cooperation is practiced to a very high degree (e.g., the United Nations), although with some occasional hitches.

. Late Bronze Age: Writing is known, although mainly in cumbersome, syllabic forms such as Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Mycenaean Linear A and B scripts, or the Hittite/Akkadian cuneiform. Literacy is probably restricted to the highest levels of the aristocracy and a professional class of scribes, bureaucrats, diplomats, etc.

Iron Age: Literacy, at least in the Greek-speaking world, is only beginning to be rediscovered, using a different alphabet, where each letter represents a particular sound and not an entire syllable. Literacy is still most likely restricted to the upper classes and some professionals, like rhapsodes and some artists.

Late twentieth century: The vast majority of people are at least able to read and write well enough to conduct their own business affairs.

. Late Bronze Age: Religious observances take place mainly in family or group gatherings. There may be a place set aside for a cultic figure or idol, but sites specifically set aside for formal, public worship are rare and difficult to identify, if they existed at all.

Iron Age: Family observances are still practiced, especially with regard to reverencing the graves of one's ancestors, but formal cultic centers are beginning to be established and playing a more important role as religious practices crystallize.

Late twentieth century: Religious practices vary from country to country and from one religion to another, though most of the major world religions do have certain specific places set aside for formal public worship which are identified as such and not used for other purposes. Many believers may also have at least some objects of religious devotion or practice in their homes.

What Do I Read Next?

. The *Iliad* is the other epic poem written by Homer, and it tells some of the events of the Trojan War which take place before the opening of the *Odyssey*. The best translations into English are those of Lattimore (Harper & Row, 1967) and Fagles (Viking, 1996).

. Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem *Ulysses* takes a look at Odysseus in later life and is generally regarded as one of the better examples of English Romantic verse. He also wrote *The Lotos-Eaters*, focusing on a specific incident from Book 9 of the *Odyssey*.

. Nikos Kazantzakis (author of, among other works, *The Last Temptation of Christ*) wrote his *Odyssey* in 1938. In this work, Odysseus is presented as a dissatisfied and wandering man who leaves home, kidnaps Helen, and travels all across the known world-part of the way on an iceberg.

. Perhaps the best-known related work in English is James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*, which was very nearly banned in the United States when it was originally published. Joyce's work depicts scenes and events from everyday life in the dramatic framework of the *Odyssey*. For example, the Circe episode from Homer's work is portrayed as an extended romp in a brothel.

. For a factual look at the life of Heinrich Schliemann, the German businessman! archaeologist who first excavated Troy, Mycenae, and several other Homeric sites (including several on the island of Ithaca), David A Traill's *Schliemann of Troy: Treasure and Deceit* (St. Martin's Press, 1995) is a commendable critical biography.

Sources for Further Study

Biers, William R. *The Archaeology of Greece' An Introduction*. Cornell University Press, 1980.

A good basic introduction to Greek archaeology. Many illustrations.

Camps, William A *An Introduction to Homer*. Oxford University Press, 1980.

A good overview of Homer and his work, not too technical, and with notes on important points in both poems

Easterling, P. E, and Knox, B. M. W., editors, *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Volume I, Part I, "Early Greek Poetry." Cambridge University Press, 1989

A brief, though somewhat technical, overview of the earliest Greek writers to have survived. This volume is the first in a series by Cambridge that covers the whole history of Greek literature through the Hellenistic period and into the empire

Griffin, Jasper. *Homer. The Odyssey* (Landmarks of World Literature series). Cambridge University Press, 1987.

A convenient, affordable, pocket-sized overview of the work and its author.

Hammond, N. G. L. *A History of Greece to 322 BC*, 3d edition. Oxford University Press, 1986.

The "standard" history of Greece before the time of Alexander. The print is small and the text fairly dense, but it remains a worthwhile resource to consult.

Harvey, Paul, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1984.

A very useful ready-reference tool for basic facts, names, and dates.

Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, translated by George Rawlinson; introduction by Francis R B. Godolphin. Modern Library, 1942.

Although not very recent, among the best translations of Herodotus Although he was technically writing about the war between the Greeks and the Persians, as he is discussing the origins of the war Herodotus covers quite a lot of other ground, and offers some fascinating (and often fanciful) historical details, including several references to Homer and his works.

Homer. *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore. Harper & Row, 1967.

Lattimore's translation reproduces Homer's original line structure much better than any other verse translation, yet without sacrificing either the ease of reading or the flow of the translation.

- *The Odyssey of Homer*, 2nd edition, edited, with general and grammatical introduction, commentary, and indexes, by W. B. Stanford Macmillan, 1974.

A very good edition, with technical commentary, of the Greek original

-. *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald Anchor, 1963, reissued in 1990 by Vintage Books

A rather loose verse translation of the poem. Some readers may find Fitzgerald's direct transliteration of the Greek names confusing

-. *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fagles; introduction and notes by Bernard Knox. Viking, 1996.

Perhaps the most recent and certainly one of the more critically acclaimed translations of the *Odyssey*, Fagles offers a rendition in blank verse that is somewhat more free than Lattimore's or Fitzgerald's translations, but without diluting the poetic character of the epic Knox's introduction is well Written and very informative

Homeri Opera, Vols. III and IV, 2nd ed., edited by Thomas W. Allen. Oxford University Press, 1919.

The standard edition of the original Greek text.

Internet Movie Database, The. (<http://www.imdb.com>)

An exhaustive listing of movie and television productions from the 1890s to the present, with extensive search capabilities.

Jones, Peter V. "Introduction," in *The Odyssey*, translated by E V Rieu. Penguin Classics, 1946, 1991.

A good, broad-based introduction to the poem that does not require a knowledge of Greek. An excellent resource for finding textual references to various people and places named in the poem, and a good bibliography of further reading material.

Knox, Bernard, editor. *The Norton Book of Classical Literature*. W. W. Norton, 1993.

More a book of selected passages from famous works of classical literature, it nevertheless contains some basic information about the authors and works it discusses

Levi, Peter. *The Pelican History of Greek Literature*. Penguin, 1985

A good basic reference for Greek literature generally, and one that does not require a knowledge of Greek.

Perseus Project, The. (<http://www.perseustufts.edu/>).

An extensive online reference source for primary and secondary source materials in both Greek and English, standard reference works, etc. Invaluable for tracing down references to characters in secondary sources, and much quicker for determining the frequency of word usage, etc.

Reynolds, L D., and Wilson, N. G. *Scribes and Scholars A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 2nd edition Oxford University Press, 1974.

A rather technical work dealing with books and the "book trade" in antiquity, and the process by which ancient texts have come down to us from the classical world

Solomon, Jon D. "In the Wake of *Cleopatra*' The Ancient World in the Cinema Since 1963," *Classical Journal*, Vol 91, no. 2, 1996, pp. 113-40

A chronology with basic information on film and television productions which are based on or which mention works from classical antiquity.

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, translated by Richard Crawley; revised with an introduction by T. E Wick. Modern Library, 1982.

One of the best translations of Thucydides into English, even given its age. Very readable.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Epics for Students*.

Project Editor

David Galens

Editorial

Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research

Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture

Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions

Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia

Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design

Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing

Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact

The Gale Group, Inc

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535

Or you can visit our Internet site at

<http://www.gale.com>

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means--graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems--without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at <http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions>, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department

The Gale Group, Inc

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:

248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006

Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Epics for Students (EfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to

information about the work. Part of Gale's For Students Literature line, EfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on classic novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of EfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of EfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members educational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in EfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.

- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as *The Narrator* and alphabetized as *Narrator*. If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name *Jean Louise Finch* would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname *Scout Finch*.
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the *Subject/Theme Index*.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the *Glossary*.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first

received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by EfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- **Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- **Further Reading:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- **Media Adaptations:** a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- **Topics for Further Study:** a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- **Compare and Contrast Box:** an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- **What Do I Read Next?:** a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures,

and eras.

Other Features

EfS includes *The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature*, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how *Epics for Students* can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing *Epics for Students*

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of *Epics for Students* may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from EfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

Night. *Epics for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from EfS (usually the first piece under the *Criticism* subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on *Winesburg, Ohio*. *Epics for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition, *Canadian Literature* No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in *Epics for Students*, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. Richard Wright: *Wearing the Mask*, in *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in *Novels for Students*, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of *Epics for Students* welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Epics for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535